

Reason-Statements as Non-Extensional Contexts

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1. Introduction

This article explores the concept of *practical reasons*. It concentrates on statements of the form ‘x is a reason to ϕ ’ made in the *standard normative sense*.¹ These statements are admittedly elliptic. The context of the utterance usually specifies the agents (often ‘us’) for whom x is a reason and the circumstances where it is a reason. If there are no clear candidates for the agents and the circumstances, it is assumed that x is a reason to ϕ for everyone in all circumstances.²

We make reason-statements in the standard normative sense when we mean that x is a *good* reason to ϕ .³ This implies that x is taken to ‘count in favour of’ ϕ ing. We can also say that, if x is a reason to ϕ in this sense, then, to some degree, x makes ϕ ing sensible, right, or what one ought to do.

Similar reasons-statements can also be made in a different sense when we explain actions. In these cases, we are interested in what motivated the agent to act – what were her reasons, as she saw them, for the action. Here, I will set aside the ‘explanatory’ or ‘motivating’ reasons of these statements.

Linguistically, the relevant reason-statements have the following syntactic structure:

[x] [[[is] [a reason]] [[for] [Y to ϕ]]]

¹ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard UP, 1998), p. 19.

² M. Schroeder, *Slaves of Passions* (Oxford UP, 2007), pp. 15–18.

³ Scanlon, *What We Owe*, pp. 17–19, and J. Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 1–5.

Here 'x' is the syntactic subject, 'reason' a noun which together with the copula 'is' forms a verb phrase 'is a reason', and the expression 'for Y to ϕ ' is an infinitival clause for that phrase.

I will assume that statements of the form 'x is a reason to ϕ ' have an underlying logical form which differs from the previous syntactic structure. This logical form is simpler.⁴ It consists of just three elements. One of these is the specification of an act for which the statement attributes a reason. This act is picked out by the statement's second verb for which the schematic letter ' ϕ ' stands in for in the formula.

The second element of these statements is the specification of the reasons which these statements ascribe for the relevant acts. In the next section, I will explain why many philosophers today believe that these reasons must be facts.

The third element of these statements is the phrase '... is a reason to...'. As shown above, this expression is not a predicate linguistically speaking. However, according to many, this expression applies truthfully when and only when a normative relation holds between a fact and an act. For this reason, I will treat it as a predicate with two argument-places. This merely means that the phrase is an 'unsaturated' predicate-expression on the underlying level of logic. It makes a certain contribution to the truth-conditions of the propositions which can also be expressed in ordinary English.

My main focus is the nature of this predicate. Consider other relation-ascribing predicates such as '...is the father of...'. It can be used to make true statements whenever (i) both relata X and Y exist, and (ii) the being a father of relation holds between them. Once reasons are considered to be facts, it is tempting to understand reasons-statements in this same way. The reasons-predicate could then be

⁴ Pekka Väyrynen, 'A Wrong Turn to Reasons', in M. Brady (ed.), *New Waves in Metaethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 185–207, at p. 186.

used to make true statements of the form ‘x is a reason to ϕ ’ when (i) both x exists and the act of ϕ ing takes place, and (ii) a favouring-relation holds between the fact that X is F and the relevant act. We are pushed towards such an account because it is commonplace to think that non-reflexive relations such as the favouring-relation must connect some objects. How could the relation hold if the facts and acts the relation is supposed to connect are not there?⁵

In the third section, I will introduce three problematic consequences of this combination of views. One of these problems is that we seem to have reasons even when the relevant facts do not obtain. The second problem concerns cases in which facts seem to be reasons for actions that never take place, and the third problem has to do with how to distinguish between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons.

These problems do not arise merely because the semantic value of the reason-predicate is a favouring-relation. The philosophers who talk about that relation need not believe that the ascriptions of the favouring-relation work in the same way as the ascriptions of other relations such as the fatherhood-relation. One could, for example, understand favouring in terms of what explains why the act is right, and then think that such explanations can be illuminating even when the facts mentioned in the explanans fail to obtain. However, my aim is to show that there is a more straightforward solution to the previous problems even when reasons are understood as facts and reason-relations in terms of favouring.

In order to solve these problems then, in the fourth section, I will explain how there are two kinds of predicates. Some predicates create extensional contexts whereas others create non-extensional contexts.

In the last two sections, I provide two arguments for why we should consider the predicate ‘is a reason to’ to create non-extensional contexts when it is used. Firstly,

⁵ This challenge is often presented for those who understand reasons in terms of favouring and deny that reasons are merely mental states (see R.J. Wallace, ‘Explanation, Deliberation, and Reasons’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 64 (2003), pp. 429–435, at p. 430).

I apply the ‘slingshot argument’ to argue that the predicate ‘is a reason to’ must create non-extensional contexts, or otherwise, if some fact is a reason for an act, then any other fact will equally be a reason for that act. Secondly, in the concluding section, I argue that we should also accept the non-extensionality of reason-statements also because this would solve the problems discussed in the third section.

2. Facts as Reasons

One project would be to give a semantic analysis of the reason-statements made in the ordinary language. For this purpose, one would collect empirical data about what ordinary speakers are willing to substitute for x in the ‘ x is a reason to ϕ ’ expressions. I am not interested in this question below, because I do not expect that ordinary speakers always use this expression in the standard normative sense. I will not rely on linguistic data as evidence either.

The previous project is distinct from the philosophical question of what kind of entities make the normative contribution of counting in favour of certain actions. When philosophers discuss this issue, they too make claims of the form ‘ x is a reason to ϕ ’. However, it should not be assumed that the entities which philosophers place in the position of x belong to the same ontological category as whatever ordinary speakers tend to place to that same position. Perhaps philosophers do use the word ‘reasons’ in a technical sense (namely, in the standard normative sense).

Many philosophers today think that practical reasons are facts. Earlier work on reasons often assumed so-called *psychologism*.⁶ According to it, good reasons are always combinations of psychological states. It is often assumed that all psychological states are either belief-like or desire-like.⁷ The difference between these two kinds of states is based on the different ‘directions of fit’. Beliefs are states that aim at

⁶ This is Dancy’s name for a similar view about motivating reasons (Dancy, *Practical Reality*, p. 15).

⁷ G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), p. 56, and M. Platts, *Ways of Meaning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 256–257.

representing the world as it is. Desires, in contrast, represent how the world is to be. Their aim is to get the world to match the mental states.

That desire-belief pairs would be reasons seems initially plausible. My desire to learn to sing and my belief that practicing is a means to do this together seem like a good reason to practice.⁸ Likewise, a positive attitude towards a certain general feature of acts and a belief that some act has that feature could be thought to be a reason to do that act.⁹ Thus, my admiration of bravery and a belief that asking a question is brave seem like a good reason to ask the question. Some philosophers have thought that all reasons are such pairs of positive attitudes and beliefs.

Despite this, not all philosophers accept today that psychological states are usually good reasons (even if some of them are).¹⁰ This change has happened perhaps for the following reasons.

Firstly, psychologism entails both too few and too many reasons.¹¹ In the ‘too few’ cases, agents lack the beliefs and desires that would be required to be their reasons. If I do not believe that the truck heading towards me will hurt me (and I do not believe anything that suggests otherwise), it is not clear which psychological state of mine could be a reason to step aside on the psychologist view. Similarly, it is not clear which psychological state of mine could be a reason for me not to beat my wife, if I lack any desire that would be served by not doing so.¹²

⁸ This is the standard story of the reasons which rationalise actions inherited from David Hume (see M. Smith, ‘Instrumental Desires, Instrumental Rationality’, *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement*, 78 (2004), pp. 93–109, at p. 101, and D. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Clarendon Press, 1968 [1740]), book 2, sec. 3).

⁹ D. Davidson, ‘Actions, Reasons, and Causes’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 60 (1963), p. 685–700, at p. 685.

¹⁰ For discussions, see Dancy, *Practical Reality*, chs. 2–3, and p. 100; Scanlon, *What We Owe*, ch. 1, sec. 9; R. Chang, ‘Can Desires Provide Reasons for Actions?’, in J. Wallace et al (eds.), *Reason and Value* (Oxford UP, 2004), pp. 56–90; J. Raz, ‘Incommensurability and Agency’, in his *Engaging Reason* (Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 46–66; A. Mele, *Motivation and Agency* (Oxford UP, 2003), ch. 6; and D. Parfit, ‘Rationality and Reasons’, in Egonson et al (eds.), *Exploring Practical Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 17–39.

¹¹ Dancy, *Practical Reality*, p. 28.

¹² For a discussion, see Bernard Williams, ‘Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame’, in his *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge UP), pp. 35–45, at p. 39, and Scanlon, *What We Owe*, pp. 366–367. This ‘too few’ reasons objection is often made to the ‘existence-internalist’ theories of reasons

In the ‘too many’ cases, the agent has beliefs and desires that seem to be good reasons in some circumstances, but the agent is not in them. When the sun is shining, the belief that it is seems like a good reason to go for a walk. But, consider a case in which, unbeknownst to me, it is raining. If my belief that the sun is shining is a good reason to go for a walk, then even in this case I would have a good reason to go for a walk. Yet, this does not seem to be always true.

Other problematic cases are based on the instrumental reasons introduced above. If we accept that a desire for some state of affairs to obtain and a belief about the means to it are a reason for taking the means, we will be able to detach strange reasons. I may happen to desire to eat mud and believe that using a spoon is a means to achieve this aim, but it seems stretched to claim that I would thereby have a reason – my belief-desire pair – to use a spoon to eat mud.¹³

Furthermore, we must have some basic ends that we do not desire to achieve for the sake of achieving some more fundamental ends. The reasons for having these ends cannot then be provided by other desires but rather by the features of the desired ends.¹⁴ If there are such other reasons for the final ends, then it seems like those same considerations are also good reasons for the actions which serve those ends.¹⁵ This leaves us with the desires that are not based on reasons. We usually take these desires to be more like urges for silly things. And, as illustrated by the mud-eating case above, we deny that there are reasons based on our desires to do what would bring such silly things about.¹⁶

according to which there are desire-based conditions for existence of reasons. Such views are neutral about whether reasons themselves are mental-states or some other considerations.

¹³ For this ‘bootstrapping’ objection, see M. Bratman, *Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Harvard UP, 1987), pp. 23–27.

¹⁴ See Parfit, ‘Rationality and Reasons’, pp. 20–27.

¹⁵ See J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford UP, 1986), p. 141, and Raz, ‘Incommensurability’, sec. 3. The argument is that the desire would be redundant as an additional reason for the action.

¹⁶ W. Quinn, ‘Putting Rationality in Its Place’, in his *Morality and Action* (Cambridge UP, 1993), p. 246.

These arguments have convinced many that good reasons are usually some ‘considerations’ instead of psychological states.¹⁷ It might even look like even persons or diseases could be reasons.¹⁸ Your friend can be a reason for you to go to a restaurant, whereas the food-poisoning you will get can be a reason not to do so.

However, these views about reasons can also be conveyed by using that-clauses.¹⁹ It can be claimed that the reason in question to go to the restaurant is *that your friend is there* and the reason not to do so is *that you will get a food-poisoning*. Even if we are able to give the same type of a subject for the previous reason-statements in this way, this still leaves an important question open. When *that your friend is in the restaurant* is a reason, is the reason the *proposition* that your friend is there, or the *fact* that she is there?²⁰ Many philosophers prefer the latter option for the following reason.

Many think that propositions are special objects. According to them, the proposition *that S* is the object to which A is in a ‘believing-relation’ when she believes that S. Such objects are special because they would have an important semantic property essentially. Propositions in this case would have to be representational, and thus they would need to have truth-conditions.

Because different belief- and sentence-tokens can share the same proposition as their content, propositions are taken often to be abstract, mind-independent objects. As such, they are constituted by other abstract objects, *concepts*, and a structure between them.²¹ Concepts have objects, properties, and the like as their referents. A

¹⁷ This is compatible with that whether some considerations are reasons for an agent depends on her mental states. So, one can think a consideration can be a reason only if the agent ought to be aware of it (Dancy, *Practical Reality*, pp. 55–57), or only if it could motivate the agent to act if she deliberated ‘soundly’ on the basis of her subjective motivational set (Williams, ‘Internal Reasons’), or only if its truth would make it more probable that some of the agent’s actual desires are satisfied (Schroeder, *Slaves of Passions*, p. 29).

¹⁸ Schroeder, *Slaves of Passions*, p. 20.

¹⁹ See M. Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons* (Oxford UP, 2010), pp. 41–42.

²⁰ W. Kunne, *Conceptions of Truth* (Oxford UP, 2003), p. 253.

²¹ G.E. Moore, ‘The Nature of Judgment’, *Mind*, 8 (1899), pp. 176–193, at p. 179. According to an alternative view, a proposition is the set of possible worlds in which the sentence which expresses the

proposition is true if the relations between the relevant referents match the structure of the concepts in the proposition.

Many share Dancy's belief that this sort of abstract, semantic objects would be 'wrong sort of beast[s]' to be reasons.²² They could not require actions from us. We accept rather that some features of the reality represented in the propositions are able to do this. Many therefore think that the that-clauses in the true reason-statements refer to facts instead of propositions. Facts are concrete, worldly entities that consist of individuals and their 'propertiedness'. They seem like better candidates for reasons. *That my friend is in pain* can, as a fact, call me to help her. One could, of course, equally well think that the relevant that-clauses in the reason-statements picked out events or tropes instead of facts. Nothing depends on this below.

There is an alternative, 'Russellian' understanding of propositions.²³ On this view, propositions are entities that consist of concrete individuals and instantiations of properties. The proposition 'that your friend is in the restaurant' would thus consist of your friend, the restaurant, and the 'being in' relation between them. According to this view therefore, true propositions just *are* worldly facts. The defenders of these propositions can too accept that facts (i.e., the true propositions) are good reasons.

3. Three Problems about Reasons

If reasons were facts, then it would be natural to think that, in the true reason-statements, the 'is a reason to' predicate picks out a favouring-relation which connects the facts that are reasons and the acts for which they are reasons. This view about true

proposition is true, or the function that maps the sentence to a truth-value in each world (R. Montague, 'On the Nature of Certain Philosophical Entities', *The Monist*, 53 (1960)).

²² Dancy, *Practical Reality*, p. 115, and S. Finlay, *Confusion of Tongues: A Theory of Normativity* (unpublished book-manuscript), ch. 5. sec 6). This argument is here merely a part of the explanation for why many think today that reasons are facts rather than propositions. If reasons were propositions, then my main thesis – that reason-statements are non-extensional contexts – would be true because propositions are non-extensional.

²³ B. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics* (New York: Norton, 1903), p. 47.

reasons-statements would be exactly analogical to how true claims about fatherhood pick out a relation that holds between individuals. Just in the same way as a true statement about fatherhood requires the existence of a son, a father, and the parenthood-relation between them, true statements about reasons would seem to require there exists a fact, an act, and a favouring-relation between them.

However, this combination of views has unintuitive consequences. According to it, one could not have a reason to do a given act when the relevant facts that are taken to be reasons for that act do not obtain.²⁴ To see this, assume that I'm on a coast. I'm told to leave because a hurricane will hit the spot. I take the fact that a hurricane will hit the coast to be a good reason to leave and for this reason I leave the place.

The hurricane changes its path and fails to hit the spot. The question then is, was there a good reason for me to leave? Intuitively, there was.²⁵ Something really counted in favour of leaving. We might even want to say that the reason for which I left was a good one. Yet, for me, that reason was the fact that the hurricane will hit the coast. The problem is that it seems like this fact could not have been a good reason simply because there was no such fact. The hurricane after all never hit the coast.²⁶

Perhaps this objection could be avoided by saying that either (i) facts about what could have happened, or (ii) facts about what I was advised to do, or (iii) my beliefs are the real reasons here. However, similar worries could be raised about all these solutions, and they also seem to lead to awkward forms of disjunctivism.²⁷

There is a similar problem on the other, act-side of the reason-relation.²⁸ Imagine that terrorists have planted a bomb. When interrogating them, Jack finds out the code which could be used to prevent the explosion. He later forgets the code and

²⁴ H.A. Prichard, 'Duty and Ignorance of Fact', in his *Moral Obligation* (Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 29.

²⁵ This intuition is contested in Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*, p. 177.

²⁶ See Prichard, 'Duty', p. 30. Dancy suggests that the reason is that I do not know that there will not be a hurricane (see Dancy, *Practical Reality*, p. 55). The problem is that this fact can obtain always so I would have equal reason to leave all the time.

²⁷ Dancy, *Practical Reality*, pp. 138–145.

²⁸ J. Dancy, 'Defending the Right', *The Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 4 (2007), pp. 85–97, at sec. 3.

the bomb goes off. Intuitively, the statement ‘the fact that the explosion can be prevented is a reason for Jack to use the code’ is true in this scenario.

This statement aims at correctly representing a certain relation between the fact that the explosion can be prevented and Jack’s act of using of the code. Unfortunately, that act never takes place. It is then not obvious how the relevant fact could have been in the reason-relation *to* something that does not and will not exist. Therefore, there does not seem to be a reason-relation that could make the intuitively true reason-statement true.

One solution to this problem would be to claim that the relatum (‘to ϕ ’) in this case is an action-type rather than an action-token. In this situation, the truth of the relevant reason-statements could be claimed to require the existence of the mentioned act-type. Yet, the existence of such types could be thought to be independent of the existence of the tokens, and thus the relevant types would be present even in the cases in which the relevant actions are not done. I am neutral between this solution and the solution offered below because both solutions agree that the relevant argument-place is a ‘non-extensional’ context.

The last problem for understanding the reasons as facts and the favouring-relation in the way explained above concerns the distinction between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons. There seems to be an intuitive difference between the two. Facts such as *that there are millions living in poverty* seem to be good reasons (say, to give money for charity) that belong to the agent-neutral category. When such a reason is specified, no special pronominal references are needed to the agents for whom the fact is a reason.

In contrast, facts such as *that I promised* seem to be agent-relative reasons. When this reason is specified, a pronominal reference must be made in the ‘fact-

element' to the agent (i.e., to me) whose reason is in question. That a promise would be broken seems to give no reason for me to do anything unless it was *my* promise.

This intuitive way of making the distinction is based on whether a pronominal back-reference must be made to the agent in the specification of the reason.²⁹ The problem is that, if reasons are facts, it is never the case that a pronominal back-reference is ineliminable in the specification of the fact that is a reason.³⁰

This is because any fact that is specified by making a pronominal back-reference to an agent can be specified without such a reference. The fact that *I* promised can be equally well described as the fact that certain basic particles moved in a certain area of the space-time in a certain way. The latter specification of the fact makes no *pronominal* back-reference to the agent and thus the reason would not be an agent-relative one. The defender of agent-relative reasons would then have to defend indexical facts that cannot be reduced to other facts.

Most other ways to draw this distinction rely on general principles that capture all the reasons of a given sort.³¹ Roughly, if such a principle includes a free-agent variable (a form of anaphoric, ineliminable reference to the agent whose reason is in question) in the specification of the modally sufficient condition for having the relevant reason, then the reasons under the principle are agent-relative.³² Otherwise, they are agent-neutral.

Consider the principle 'for every agent, if telling a joke makes someone happy, the agent has a reason to tell a joke'. If that someone is made happy is a modally

²⁹ See P. Pettit, 'Universality without Utilitarianism', *Mind*, 72 (1987), pp. 74–82.

³⁰ M. Ridge, 'Reasons for Action: Agent-Neutral vs. Agent-Relative', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), E. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/reasons-agent/>>.

³¹ A third proposal claims that agent-relative reasons can be only recognised from the agent's perspective, whereas others can be recognised from a general perspective (Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, p. 246). However, it is not clear why agent-relative reasons like that S has a reason to protect *her* child cannot be recognised from a general perspective (Ridge, 'Reasons for Actions', sec. 3).

³² Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton UP, 1970), p. 91. Particularists will deny that any consideration is modally sufficient for having a reason (Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, p. 60). Ridge proposes that the relevant principles should therefore be hedged (Ridge, 'Reasons for Actions', sec. 4).

sufficient condition for having a reason to tell a joke, then the resulting reasons are agent-neutral. The specification of this modal condition does not include an essential reference to the agents for whom there will be a reason.

In contrast, consider the principle ‘for every agent, if telling a joke makes *her friend* happy, the agent has a reason to tell a joke’. It makes an essential reference to the agent in the specification of the modally sufficient condition for having the reason – ‘that *her* friend will be made happy’. As a result, the relevant reasons will be agent-relative.

This proposal fails to avoid the previous problem. In the relevant principles, the modally sufficient conditions for reasons can always be specified without a reference to the agents whose reasons are in question. Assume that the agent-relative principle above specifies a modally sufficient condition for having a reason to tell a joke – that the agent’s friend is made happy. In principle, we could completely describe every possible situation in which this condition is satisfied. In describing these possibilities, the friends who are made happy need not be identified by their relation to the joke-teller. Sufficiently detailed descriptions would suffice.

We can then form a long disjunction, ‘ D_1 , or D_2 , or ..., or D_n ’, of the complete descriptions of every possible scenario in which telling a joke would make a friend happy. This disjunction specifies the same modally sufficient condition for having a reason to tell a joke as the original principle. Telling a joke can make one’s friend happy in each of the situations described by the disjunction and only in them. However, in this specification of the condition, no references are made to the agents whose reasons are in question. Thus, the initial references to the agents are eliminable from the principle and therefore the resulting reasons would be agent-neutral. The intuitive distinction still collapses.

4. Extensional and Non-Extensional Contexts

In order to avoid these problems, we should focus on the nature of the predicate ‘is a reason to’. Some predicates create extensional contexts whereas others create non-extensional ones. Extensional contexts have two distinguishing features. First, substituting co-referring expressions in them preserves the truth of the initial statements. Second, with them, certain existential generalisation based inference patterns are truth-preserving.

Consider the predicate ‘was the author of *Huckleberry Finn*’. It can be used to make the true statement ‘Mark Twain was the author of *Huckleberry Finn*’. Because the predicate creates an extensional context, that statement remains true when we substitute co-referring terms. The name ‘Samuel Clemens’ refers to the same person as ‘Mark Twain’. If we substitute it to the previous statement, we get the equally true statement ‘Samuel Clemens was the author of *Huckleberry Finn*’.

Furthermore, in an extensional context, from the true statement ‘Mark Twain was the author of *Huckleberry Finn*’, one can infer that ‘There was some actual person such that he was the author of *Huckleberry Finn*’. I call this inference an instance of an existential generalisation based inference pattern because the inference is not merely an existential generalisation. It also introduces additional notions such as ‘person’, ‘he’, and ‘actual’.

That such inference patterns are valid in extensional contexts means that truthful uses of extensional predicates have ontological import (i.e., they are ‘factive’). They require that the objects to which the given predicate applies exist. Otherwise, by contraposition, the initial statements would not be true.

In contrast, some predicates create non-extensional contexts. They ascribe propositional attitudes, modal properties, semantic properties, and so on. In some non-extensional contexts, substituting co-referring expressions need not guarantee the

preservation of the truth of the initial statement. In other non-extensional contexts, the relevant types of existential generalisation based inference patterns can lead from truths to falsehoods and so these contexts are not ‘factive’.³³ Finally, there are also some non-extensional contexts that lack both of the distinguishing features of the extensional contexts. These two distinct hallmarks of non-extensionality are often called substitution-resistance and existence-neutrality.³⁴

All contexts with either one or both of these hallmarks used to be called simply ‘intensional contexts’. Today, the dominant usage is that intensional contexts are non-extensional but permit the substitution of necessarily co-designating expressions. Thus, some modal locutions are probably intensional, but propositional attitudes probably are not because they do not permit the relevant substitutions. The latter contexts are therefore ‘hyper-intensional’ contexts that are neither extensional nor intensional.

Consider the true modal statement ‘The fastest runner on Earth could run 80mph’. The expression ‘the fastest runner on Earth’ picks out the same person as the name ‘Usain Bolt’. Yet, if we substitute the co-referring name to the original statement, we get the false statement ‘Usain Bolt could run 80mph’. Thus, substituting a co-referring term in a non-extensional context can make a true statement false. This is because the name ‘Usain Bolt’ picks out the same person in all worlds, whereas the description ‘the fastest runner on Earth’ can pick out a much faster being in some worlds.

Furthermore, the existential generalisation based inference from ‘John believes that Superman is a superhero’ to ‘there is some actual person such that John believes that he is a superhero’ is not truth-preserving. Here, the premise can be true

³³ Some of these non-factive contexts can be ‘extensional’ in the sense that they allow substituting co-referring terms. For example, the material conditional ‘if P, then Q’ is non-factive but also non-substitution-resistant.

³⁴ G. Forbes, ‘Intensional Transitive Verbs’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2010 Edition), E. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intensional-trans-verbs/>>

even when the conclusion is false. Thus, that a non-extensional predicate is truthfully used in an assertion does not imply that what it is applied to actually exists. A truthful uses of such predicates does not even require that the relevant terms apply to *something* which just does not actually exist. We can truthfully say that ‘I am searching for the fountain of youth’. Here, there need not be non-existing thing, ‘a fountain of youth’, to which the expression ‘I am searching for’ is applied. This just is what it means for this kind of contexts to be non-factive.

5. The Slingshot Argument

If we take reasons to be facts, we should accept that the predicate ‘is a reason to’ creates a non-extensional context. Otherwise we face a problem because of the ‘slingshot argument’.³⁵

I will explain this argument informally so that it will be easier to follow. I apologise if this makes the argument seem more rudimentary than the standard formal presentations. In addition, this article is really about reasons-statements rather than about providing a definitive defence of the slingshot argument. The slingshot argument has not been previously used in this context. It has, of course, been used in many other contexts where it continues to divide opinions. I do not assume that those who do not believe that the argument works will be persuaded by it in the present context either.

³⁵ For the original argument, see A. Church, ‘Review of Carnap’s *Introduction to Semantics*’, *Philosophical Review*, 52 (1943), pp. 298–304, and D. Davidson, “True to the Facts,” in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford UP, 1984), pp. 37–54, at p. 42. For recent defences, see G. Rodriguez-Pereyra, ‘Searle’s Correspondence Theory of Truth and the Slingshot’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 48 (1998), pp. 513–522, and D. Drei, ‘The Slingshot Argument: An Improved Version’, *Ratio*, 15 (2002), pp. 194–204. Its first target was correspondence theories of truth. The argument shows that, if the statement that p is true because it corresponds to the fact that p, it is equally true because it corresponds to the fact that q. For a less assuming version of the argument, see K. Gödel, ‘Russell’s Mathematical Logic’, in P.A. Schlipp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (Northwestern UP, 1944), pp. 123–154, at pp. 128–129, and S. Neale, ‘The Philosophical Significance of Gödel’s Slingshot’, *Mind*, 104 (1995), pp. 761–825. These arguments have also been used against views according to which causation is a relation between particular facts (see D.-H. Ruben, *Explaining Explanation* (London: Routledge, 1990), ch. 5, E.J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 169–171, and M. Baumgartner, ‘Causal Slingshots’, *Erkenntnis*, 72 (2010), pp. 111–133).

I still believe that it is appropriate to use the argument in the debate about reasons too. Firstly, it has at least some supporters (see fn. 35), and even its critics do not agree about why the argument is supposed fail. Not all disbelievers even have a view about this issue. So, at least, my argument will invite the critics to investigate the flaws of the argument again. Secondly, not all moral philosophers working on practical reasons know this argument. It may have some dialectical force to persuade them to believe that reason-statements should be understood as non-extensional contexts. Finally, for those who reject this argument, I will attempt below to provide another reason to accept my conclusion about the non-extensionality of reason-statements.

For the purposes of my slingshot argument, I assume two facts. The first is that Ann has a toothache, and the second that Ben is sleeping. I also assume that ‘Socrates’ is a proper name with a particular person as its referent. Furthermore, I take the statement ‘that Ann has a toothache is a reason for her to go to the dentist’ to be true, and assume that the predicate ‘is a reason to’ creates an extensional context which allows substituting co-referring expressions.

Finally, I follow Dalia Drei in making the assumption that synonymous sentences have the same reference.³⁶ And, like Drei, I assume that synonymy of sentences is based on the following epistemological requirement for the sameness of the Fregean senses of sentences: “A and B are synonymous if it is impossible for a competent speaker (a speaker who understands both sentences) to believe A without believing B [when she has an interest in their truth and considers them carefully].”³⁷

³⁶ Drei, ‘The Slingshot’, pp. 199–203. This allows avoiding making the stronger assumption that logically equivalent sentences have the same reference, which would beg the question in the context of the argument (see J. Barwise and J. Perry, *Situations and Attitudes* (MIT Press, 1983), pp. 24–26). For a thorough defence of a similar thesis as the assumption above, see B. Streumer, ‘Are There Irreducible Normative Properties?’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 86 (2008), pp. 537–561.

³⁷ Drei, ‘The Slingshot’, p. 200.

Note that this is a less strict condition for synonymy than the idea that, for A and B to be synonymous, they would have to have the same syntactic structure and every constituent of A would have to be synonymous with every constituent of B. The problem with that condition would be that it would fail to classify the intuitively synonymous sentences ‘Ann is kind’ and ‘Kindness is a property of Ann’ as synonymous. The previous proposal, in contrast, succeeds in doing so.

Premise 1: The statement “Ann has a toothache” is synonymous with the statement “The actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates) is identical with the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ann has a toothache)”. This is because it is impossible for any competent speaker who understands both sentences (and is considering whether they are true) to believe the first sentence without believing the second one. One reliable indication of what beliefs an agent has is what kind bets she would be inclined to make about their truth. Any person who understands both of the sentences above would be disposed to make the same bets concerning their truth. Such a person will, on the basis of her semantic knowledge, realise that, in any world in which Ann has a toothache, Ann has a toothache and it is true that Socrates of our world is self-identical (and vice versa).³⁸ So, if she believes either one of the sentences to be true, she will also believe the other sentence to be true too.

I use the term ‘actual’ here in the Kaplanian way, and make no claims that the word in the ordinary language would mean the same. Here, the word ‘actual’ functions like an indexical term to specify that we are talking about the unique x that exists in *this* world.

³⁸ I assume that the semantic knowledge of the competent speakers includes the information that ‘Socrates’ is a proper name and thus must have a reference. Because of this, this premise does not necessarily require a Russellian understanding of definite descriptions (even if it is compatible with such views). It therefore is compatible with the way in which definite descriptions are understood as referring expressions in the premise 3.

Given the assumption above about the synonymy of two statements entailing that they have the same reference, this means that the statement “Ann has a toothache” has the same referent as the statement “The actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates) is identical with the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ann has a toothache)”.

Premise 2: The statement “Ben is sleeping” is synonymous with the statement “The actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates) is identical with the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ben is sleeping)” for the same reasons. Furthermore, in the light of the previous assumption, these two statements also have to share the same referent.

Premise 3: The expression “the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ann has a toothache)” refers to the same object as the expression “the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ben is sleeping)”. Both of these definite descriptions refer to Socrates of our world. They do so because he is self-identical and it is true both that Ann has a toothache and that Ben is sleeping.

Admittedly, this sameness of reference could be denied by those who accept Russell’s analysis of definite descriptions. According to it, definite descriptions are not referring expressions but rather incomplete symbols that have meaning only in the context of a sentence.³⁹ If this view were right, then the two expressions would not have the same reference and thus this premise could be rejected.⁴⁰ However, many people recognise that, by using contextual clues, we can use definite descriptions as

³⁹ See A. N. Whitehead and B. Russell, *Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge UP, 1927), ch. 3, and sec. 6 below.

⁴⁰ Neale, ‘The Philosophical Significance’, p. 786. There is a more complex version of the slingshot argument which works also for the Russellian expansions of definite descriptions (see Rodriguez-Pereyra, ‘Searle’s theory’, p. 519). Furthermore, when the description within a definite description applies only to one object, the definite descriptions can be treated as if they were singular terms for derivational purposes. This would allow us to employ the argument above (see Neale, ‘The Philosophical Significance’, 786–787).

directly referring terms whenever we intend to.⁴¹ This the way in which I use them here.

Failing that, we could also assume that there is a more general notion than ‘referring’ such as ‘designating’. Two expressions would be co-designating whenever they happen to pick out the same individual (for instance, ‘all the boys’ and ‘John’ can designate the same object if John happens to be the only boy). Extensionality could then be understood in terms of allowing substitution of co-designating terms in this sense.⁴²

Step 1: Let us assume that the statement “that Ann has a toothache is a reason for her to go to the dentist” is true. We are also assuming, for the sake of the argument, that the reason-predicate in this sentence creates an extensional context in which substituting co-referring terms preserves truth. Thus, by the substitution of the co-referring statements of the premise 1, the truth of the original assumption about Ann’s reason entails the truth of the statement “that the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates) is identical with the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ann has a toothache) is a reason for Ann to go to the dentist”. The context to which the substitution of the statements in the premise 1 is made is here ‘that ... is a reason for Ann to go to the dentist’.

Step 2: If the previous statement is true and the predicate ‘is a reason to’ creates an extensional context, substituting co-referring expressions in this statement again preserves its truth. Given the co-referring expressions of the premise 3, the last true statement of the previous step 1 entails the truth of the statement “that the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates) is identical with the actual unique x such that (x is identical with Socrates and Ben is sleeping) is a reason for Ann to go to the dentist”.

⁴¹ K. Donnellan, ‘Reference and Definite Descriptions’, *Philosophical Review*, 75 (1966), pp. 281–304, and Lowe, *A Survey*, p. 173.

⁴² S. Neale, ‘The Philosophical Significance’, p. 786.

Step 3: Given that this statement is true and an extensional context, its truth will be preserved if we substitute co-referring statements in it. Because of the two statements in the premise 2 are co-referring, if the statement in the step 2 is true, then the statement “that Ben is sleeping is a reason for Ann to go to the dentist” must be true too.

We have then deduced an absurd conclusion from the true statement about Ann’s reason and the other assumptions. Yet, that Ben is sleeping is not a reason for Ann to go to the dentist. In the same way, we could show that any fact is a reason for an act for which some fact is a reason. This conclusion follows from two main assumptions. One of them is that reasons are facts as it is reasonable to assume.

Thus, to avoid the reductio, we should give up the assumption that the predicate ‘is a reason to’ creates an extensional context.⁴³ If it creates a non-extensional context, then substituting co-referring expressions need not preserve truth. In such contexts, doing this can change a truth into a falsehood. Therefore, accepting the non-extensionality of this predicate blocks the previous argument at step 1. If reason-statements are non-extensional, no absurdities about reasons follow. We thus have some general reasons to believe that reason-statements are non-extensional contexts.

At this point, it is useful to make two further observations. Firstly, the predicate ‘is a reason to’ has two argument-places. The previous argument only shows that the first, left-hand side argument-place is a non-extensional context. This as such does not yet show that the other argument-place is a non-extensional context too.

It is not clear whether the slingshot argument could also be applied to the argument-place on the right-hand side of the relevant statements, because we do not

⁴³ This move is also used in the causation-debates. The idea is that the statement ‘The fact A caused the fact B’ is a causal *explanation*. Because explanations are interest-relative, their truth can depend on the description of the facts. This makes the context non-extensional and stops the slingshot. See Lowe, *A Survey*, pp. 172–173.

find a that-clause from that argument-place but rather verbs which specify acts. It might be that every reason-statement of the form ‘x is a reason to φ ’ is equivalent with a statement of the form ‘x is a reason to bring it about *that φ ing is done*’. In that case, we could use the slingshot-argument to show that, if reasons-statements are extensional contexts and some fact is a reason for some action, it is also a reason for any other action.

The second point to emphasise is that, in order to stop the slingshot argument, we only need to accept that reasons-statements are non-extensional contexts in the sense of being substitution-resistant. One lesson often drawn from the slingshot-argument is that, when we place facts in the reason-statements, we need stricter principles of substitution than merely the purely extensional principles used above.⁴⁴ I will try to show below how such principles can be used to create room for making the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons.

There is also an alternative way to avoid the problem by individuating facts in a fine-grained way.⁴⁵ In this way, the different descriptions of the facts that are reasons in the slingshot-argument would fail to be co-referring terms, and thus the required substitutions could not be made. In other words, if facts were individuated in a fine-grained way, then the reasons-statements in which such facts are mentioned would be substitution-resistant and the slingshot-argument could thus be avoided.

Whichever of these solutions we choose, it must be still emphasised that the substitution-resistance of the reason-statements does not in itself entail that these statements also bear the other hallmark of non-extensional contexts, namely existence-neutrality (i.e., they need not be non-factive for this reason). This is because, as accepted above, these two hallmarks are independent of one another. For one, no substitutions are made in the relevant existential generalisation based inference

⁴⁴ In the more general form, this is the lesson drawn by Neale, ‘The Philosophical Significance’, sec. 16.

⁴⁵ See Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*, p. 43, and especially Ruben, *Explaining Explanations*, pp. 167–180.

patterns that tease out the potential ontological consequences of mentioning facts in the reason-statements. Given that only the existence-neutrality (i.e., non-factiveness) of reasons-statements would solve the first two problems of the third section above, the conclusions drawn from the slingshot argument themselves will not offer us a solution to those problems.

For these reasons, I will now turn to how the non-extensionality of reasons-statements would itself solve the three problems of the view that reasons are facts. In that case, we also would have independent reasons for believing that reasons-statements are non-extensional contexts.

6. Solving the Three Problems about Reasons

The fact that non-extensional contexts do not tend to support existential generalisation based inference patterns (i.e., that they tend to be non-factive) can be used to solve the first two problems of the section 3. The worry was that the statements ‘that a hurricane will hit the coast is a reason to leave’ and ‘that the explosion can be prevented is a reason for Jack to use the code’ can be true even when the hurricane will hit the coast and the act of using the code never takes place. However, if the truth-conditions of the reasons-statements were provided by the normative relations between facts and acts, then this could not be the case.

In contrast, if reason-statements were non-extensional in the sense that they exhibited existence-neutrality (i.e., they were non-factive) and therefore did not permit making existential generalisation based inferences, we could not deduce from the truth of the first statement that there really is an actual fact such that it is in a reason-relation to the act of leaving. Likewise, we could not deduce from the truth of the second statement that there is an actual act such that the fact that the explosion can be prevented stands in a reason-relation to it.

If these deductions were not valid, then the reason-statements could be true even when these existential statements were false (when the relevant facts or acts do not exist). One could not then argue, by mere contraposition, from the inexistence of the relevant facts or acts to the falsehood of the reason-statements. This works often in the same way in other non-extensional and non-factive contexts. That there are no actual cars such that they could run on nuclear power does not make it any less true that a car could run on nuclear power.

Two objections could be made to this. First, it could be objected that this proposal creates too many reasons. It could now be that the fact that my tooth aches is a good reason for me to go to the dentist even when my tooth does not actually ache. Does this not mean that I have a reason to go to the dentist all the time? This need not follow. One could accept that facts can be reasons for acts only if there is sufficient evidential support for believing in them. Because there is no such support for the belief that it is a fact that my tooth aches now, that fact need not be a good reason to go to the dentist.

Secondly, it could be objected that, independently of what we think about the nature of the reasons-predicate, the thesis that reasons are facts will have existential consequences. After all, a legitimate expansion of the statement 'that X is F is a reason to φ ' is 'the fact that X is F is a reason to φ '. It could then be claimed that, because the word 'fact' is used in the latter statement, the truth of the former statement requires that it is true that X is F, and thus this statement must be factive.

Fortunately, this does not follow. The word 'fact' itself is used in many contexts without any ontological implications. For instance, I can wonder whether it is a fact that pigs fly without committing myself to the existence of flying pigs. In response to this, it could be claimed that it is not the word 'fact' that has ontological implications but rather the use of the definite article 'the' in the statement 'the fact

that X is F is a reason to ϕ '. That article seems to create a definite description of a certain fact, and this might be claimed to require the existence of that fact in all contexts.⁴⁶ This thought is supported by the intuition that there is no satisfactory way to complete the sentence 'I am aware of the fact that ...' without making a statement about something that really exists.

There is an easy explanation for why definite descriptions of facts might seem to have ontological implications. According to Russell, an expression of the form 'the fact that X is F is a reason to ϕ ' can be analysed as a conjunction of the following three thesis: (i) There is a fact that X is F, (ii) There is not more than one fact that X is F, and (iii) There is nothing which is the fact that X is F and not a reason to ϕ .⁴⁷ Clearly, because of the existential quantifier, (i) would seem to have ontological implications independently of what we think of the nature of the 'is a reason to' predicate (which only appears in (iii)).

In order to resist this objection, we must observe that there are examples of contexts in which definite descriptions of facts can be used correctly even when the mentioned facts do not obtain. One such context is law. This use is described by a legal theorist Monte Neil Stewart in the following way:

Thus, the word "facts" is used in a narrow, lawyerly way ... a fact is not necessarily "[s]omething that has really occurred or is actually the case" but rather what a judge, for purposes of resolving a case, will accept as such... Thus, in the lawyer's realm, the notion of "alleged fact" or even "false fact" is not unintelligible.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ H. Hochberg, *The Positivist and the Ontologist; Bergmann, Carnap and Logical Realism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 124–128. For an objection, see E.J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (Oxford UP, 1998), p. 231.

⁴⁷ B. Russell, 'On Denoting', *Mind*, 14 (1905), pp. 479–493, at p. 482.

⁴⁸ M.N. Stewart, 'Marriage Facts', *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 31 (2008), pp. 313–369, at p. 318. So, the truth of a judge's statement 'we have now heard all the facts' does not require that everything that has been heard has been true.

To illustrate further the intelligibility of this use of the term “fact” in ordinary language, here is a quote from Peter Lawler: “One clue to answering these questions is to note Jimmy’s factual error: Carole King never had a hit with ‘Amazing Grace’. And to call attention to that false fact about Carole King, Stillman actually has Jimmy mention it twice.”⁴⁹ So, at least as far as legal settings and ordinary language are concerned, there are contexts in which the expression “the fact that...” is used in a way that does not entail ontological commitments. My proposal is that the expression is used *at least sometimes* within the reasons-statements just in the very same non-factive and existence-neutral way as in these contexts – whatever it happens to be.

The last problem concerned the collapse of the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons. It seemed like the facts that are reasons can always be re-described without making a pronominal back-reference to the agents whose reasons they are, and so there could not be agent-relative reasons.

However, if reason-statements are non-extensional, then substituting co-referring terms need not preserve the truth of these statements. We already needed more stringent substitution principles to avoid the slingshot argument. Perhaps the fact that I promised is the very fact that certain basic particles moved in certain ways in a certain area of space-time. Yet, because the context is non-extensional and hence exhibits substitution-resistance, the truth of the statement ‘the fact that I promised is a reason for me to ϕ ’ need not entail the truth of the statement ‘the fact that certain basic particles moved in a certain way in a certain area of space-time is a reason for me to ϕ ’. In the same way, the truth of the statement ‘the fastest runner on Earth could

⁴⁹ P. Lawler, ‘Disco and Democracy: Thoughts on Stillman’s Film and Book’, *Perspectives on Political Science*, 31 (2002), pp. 86–95, at p. 94. Presumably that false fact mentioned in the quote is the fact that Carole King had a hit with ‘Amazing Grace’. For more examples of existence-neutral uses of the expression ‘the fact that’, see A. Betti, ‘The Naming of Facts and the Methodology of Language-Based Metaphysics’, in A. Reboul (ed.), *Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Kevin Mulligan* (www.philosophie.ch/kevin/festschrift, 2011), sec. 3.

run 80 mph' does not entail that it is true that 'Usain Bolt could run 80 mph' even if Usain Bolt is the fastest man on Earth.

A defender of agent-relative reasons can then accept that there are no agent-relative facts and that the expressions 'that I promised' and 'that certain basic particles moved in a certain way in a certain area of space-time' refer to the very same fact. She can still insist that the statement 'the fact that I promised is a reason for me to ϕ ' is true whilst the statements such as 'that certain basic particles moved in a certain way in a certain area of space-time is a reason for me to ϕ ' are false.

In this situation, the pronominal back-reference would be ineliminable in the specification of the reason and the reason an agent-relative one. If these statements are non-extensional contexts, then one cannot object to this by claiming that the truth of the first statement and the identity of the facts entail the truth of the second statement. Because substitution of co-referring expressions does not guarantee truth-preservation in non-extensional contexts, that entailment does not hold.

Thus, the non-extensionality of the reasons-statements seems to solve a variety of problems about reasons. This is another reason why we should believe that those statements are non-extensional contexts. However, this conclusion leads to a challenge which I, unfortunately, cannot fully address here for the reasons of space. We can ask, what are the truth-makers for reasons-statements if they cannot be favouring-relations between the facts that obtain and the actions we do?

To answer this question, we could claim that reasons-statements have the following kind of subjunctivist truth-conditions: the sentence 'the fact that X is F is a reason for S to ϕ ' is true if and only if (i) S justifiedly believes that X is F and (ii), if it were a fact that X is F and S ϕ ed, then that fact would count in favour of S's act of ϕ ing'. The right-hand side of this bi-conditional asks us to consider the world closest to our own world in which it is a fact (of that world) that X is F and S ϕ s. The

proposal then is that, if in that world this fact counts in favour of S's action, then the sentence 'that the fact that X is F is a reason for S to ϕ ' is true in our world (if certain other epistemic conditions are also met).

This proposal faces many challenges. Firstly, it could be asked how such a view could draw the distinction between the reasons one actually has and the conditional reasons one would if one's circumstances were slightly different. Secondly, it could be asked how the going-ons in a different possible world are supposed to determine our reasons here in the actual world. What happens to be favoured in another world just seems too alien to have normative implications for what we are to do here.

Another alternative would be to argue that our world does not only contain states of affairs that obtain (i.e., the facts) but also states of affairs that merely could do so. One could then claim that such states of affairs count in favour of ϕ ing in the relevant cases where the relevant facts are not available. These states of affairs could then be thought to be sufficiently fact-like to avoid the objections to the view that reasons are propositions.

If such evasive strategies fail to work, then my conclusion could have more radical non-cognitivist metaethical consequences. This is because an expressivist could easily explain why reasons-statements are non-extensional. On her view, those statements express contingency plans for acting on the basis of certain considerations in the relevant circumstances. Furthermore, according to expressivists, saying that such statements are true is just to express those very same plans. However, of course, it is possible (and often even sensible) to plan to act on the basis of certain considerations even in some cases in which those considerations fail to obtain. In addition, from the perspective of our planning and its efficiency, it also matters how the considerations on the basis of we plan to act are represented. This means it would

be fairly easy for the expressivists to explain both the existence-neutrality and the substitution-resistance of the reasons-statements.

However, in this article, I have only attempted to show that reasons-statements should be considered to be non-extensional contexts. Investigating how we should further specify their truth-conditions or the attitudes they express must be left for another occasion.