A PUZZLE ABOUT 'BECAUSE'

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Abstract
The essay is a partial investigation into the semantics of the explanatory connective 'because'. After three independently plausible assumptions about 'because' are presented in some detail, it is shown how their interaction generates a puzzle about 'because', once they are combined with a common view on conceptual analysis. Four possible solutions to the puzzle are considered.

Introduction

Hitherto, the natural language 'because' has not received much systematic treatment in the philosophy of language. Nevertheless, it is of high importance both for everyday discourse and for philosophical purposes; hence, it deserves much more attention than it has been given so far. In this paper, I will point out a connection between philosophical analysis and 'because'-explanations and show how it gives rise to puzzle.

The first section of the paper sets up the stage. I will present three claims about 'because' which, albeit far from constituting a comprising theory of that connective, can at least contribute important pieces to such a theory:

   a. 'because' can be used to give a certain sort of non-causal explanations which correspond to statements of analysis;

   b. 'because' is an asymmetrical connective;

   c. 'because' operates on the (fine-grained) content of sentences.

But even though each of those three claims seems plausible on its own, they interact in a potentially problematic way — they give rise to a puzzle about 'because', once they are combined with a standard view on certain examples of conceptual analyses. The second section presents that puzzle, and examines how exactly it arises.

The final section then considers four ways of reacting to the puzzle (and tentatively opts for one of them).

1. *Three Claims About 'Because'*

In this section, I will introduce three claims about 'because'. To be more precise, I will introduce three claims about 'because' *in a certain use* of that word. As linguists regularly point out, one can distinguish between genuinely explanatory and purely evidential or inferential uses of 'because'.[1] An example of the latter is provided by the following scenario: walking past the Shermans's apartment, a friend of mine and I wonder whether they are at home so that we could drop by. When he makes out a lightened window he says, 'Look! The Shermans are at home, because their lights are on.' In such a case, the 'because'-clause of the sentence does not provide an explanation of why the main clause is true. Rather, it provides some evidence for holding it true (i.e. a reason why one should think it is true). In what follows, I will only be interested in genuinely explanatory uses of 'because' and not in its evidential use.

a. The Analytic 'Because'

It is commonly agreed that there are different types of explanation, a major division being that into causal and non-causal explanations. A possible example of a subdivision within the causal explanations would be that into mechanistic ones and rationalising ones (if the latter are, as Davidson famously argued, indeed causal explanations).

Now, there is a very characteristic form of non-causal explanations which is indeed important for any kind of academic discipline. Every academic discipline is, among other things, interested in classifications of things into kinds. The kinds that are interesting for disciplines belonging to humanities are often more abstract than those which natural sciences investigate; some examples of the kinds in question are those of knowledge, belief, pious action, person, abstract object, work of fiction, novel, left-wing politician, communist state, etc. One of the central concerns in any academic discipline seems to be to understand what *makes* something an instance of a kind that the discipline is interested in. Thus, philosophers discuss the question of what makes something a piece of knowledge, a pious man, or a person. In literary studies, academics debate what makes something a work of fiction, or a novel, in politics what makes someone a left-wing politician, etc.

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[1] On the evidential use of 'because', see, for instance, Morreal (1979).

What is important to see is that accounts of what makes something *thus-and-so* correspond to true 'because'-statements.[2] If you know what *makes* something a pious action, then you know *why* something is a pious action ('that's what makes it so' and 'that's why it is so' are used interchangeably). Hence, you know for some instance of '*p*' that something is a pious action because *p*.

That accounts of what makes something *thus-and-so* correspond to explanations expressible in terms of 'because' is often overlooked. In particular, it is neglected in mainstream analytic philosophy of the twentieth century, in which it was a standard doctrine that the analysis of concepts or properties should be stated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. But necessary and sufficient conditions lack the irreversible directionality that is characteristic of 'because' (see the next subsection).

However, it is worth mentioning that the insight that analysis aims at explanations can already be found in Plato's early dialogues. It plays a crucial role in the *Euthyphro*.[3] In response to the Socratic question 'What is the pious?' Euthyphro first replies by citing some example of a pious action. Socrates then makes it clear that such a statement has the wrong *form* for answering his question, as it was intended. On the one hand, as it is typical for the early dialogues, he makes it clear that he strives for a *general* account, meaning that he wants to know at least necessary and sufficient conditions for something's being pious. But in the *Euthyphro*, he specifies the sort of answer he wants to hear even further. He wants to learn about 'the idea *in virtue of which* the pious things are pious'.[4] In other words, he wants an account of why something is a pious thing, which can properly be stated by a 'because'-sentence (if an entity is pious, it is pious because it is ...).

Let me call a 'because'-sentence corresponding to a correct account of what makes something thus-and-so an *analytic explanation*. How exactly a sentence in terms of *making* relates to the corresponding analytic explanation need not be decided here; it may be that they are just formulations of one and the same content, or it may be that the contents differ but necessarily agree in truth-value.

Notice that in using the term 'analytic', I do not want to settle on any particular view as to how those explanations work. To avoid misunderstandings, let me point out two things: first, I do not claim that all analytic explanations in the current sense have any of the virtues traditionally ascribed to *analytic*

[2] Cp. Schnieder (2006).

[3] See *Euthyphro*, Stephanus pages 10a–11e, and compare, e.g., Sharvy (1972) and Dancy (2004: ch. 6).

[4] *Euthyphro*, Stephanus pages 6d10–11; translated by the author.

truths, such as being knowable *a priori*, or being true in virtue of their meaning (though some analytic explanations may have such properties). I merely use the term 'analytic' because the explanations in question correspond to accounts of what makes something thus-and-so, and such accounts can properly be called 'analyses'. Second, I use the title 'analytic' without taking any stance on what *sort* of analysis is relevant to analytic explanations. In fact, it seems that the class of statements of the form 'that x is F makes x G' comprises analyses of very different statuses: they include traditional candidates for conceptual analyses ('that something is a true, justified belief makes it a piece of knowledge'), chemical analyses ('that something is composed of two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom makes it a water molecule'), and cases that are harder to classify, for instance some that involve a mixture of conceptual elements and empirical facts ('that Socrates died makes Xanthippe a widow'). Perhaps, they also involve some sort of non-conceptual, theoretic reduction in non-causal areas ('that something is composed of temporal parts makes it an enduring thing').

In any case, it should be obvious that the interest of understanding the mechanism of the analytic 'because' is a highly desirable goal for anyone interested in methodological issues of philosophy since it has applications all across the philosophical discipline, ranging from metaphysics over epistemology to the theory of art. What is needed, therefore, is a general semantic account of 'because' developed with the same rigour as semantic accounts of other natural language connectives. But the current paper is not the place for that enterprise; it is only meant to contribute a small piece to it.

b. The Asymmetry of 'Because'

It is often held that 'because' has the properties of being asymmetrical and irreflexive.[5] Let us briefly get clear on what exactly may be meant by this.

In logic and mathematics, 'irreflexivity' and 'asymmetry' are commonly used as labels for properties of relations, as introduced by the following definitions:

R is *irreflexive* $\leftrightarrow_{df.} \neg\exists x$ (x stands in R to x)
R is *asymmetric* $\leftrightarrow_{df.} \forall x \forall y$ (x stands in R to $y \to \neg y$ stands in R to x).

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[5] Some references will be given in footnotes 5 and 7.

(From those definitions one can see that, strictly speaking, irreflexivity is already guaranteed by asymmetry, which is a combination of antisymmetry and irreflexivity.[6])

In a derivative sense, two-place *relational predicates* are also said to be irreflexive or asymmetrical if they signify irreflexive or asymmetrical relations. An n-adic relational predicate, in the pertinent sense, is what remains after deleting n occurrences of singular terms from a sentence. Since 'because' is no such thing, but rather a sentential connective, it cannot be asymmetrical or irreflexive in the specified use of those terms. But even though 'because' is not a relational predicate, some philosophers are willing to say that it expresses a relation (compare section c.). 'Because' can then be classified as asymmetrical and/or irreflexive according to whether the relation it expresses has those properties.[7]

However, that 'because' expresses a relation is a potentially controversial claim about its semantic function (more on it below). Since not every philosopher who classifies 'because' as asymmetrical and/or irreflexive would want to underwrite that view on the function of 'because', it is worthwhile looking for an alternative explication of classifying an operator as asymmetrical. Such an alternative can be framed in terms of certain inferential properties of the sentences involving the operator: an operator may, for instance, always allow the sentences it connects to be permutated *salva veritate* ('or' is a case in question, while 'if' is not). Because of this inferential property, a connective could be called *symmetrical*.[8]

A precise definition along these lines can be given by the aid of substitutional quantification. Let us define the substitution class for the variables 'p' and 'q' as comprising all sentences of the respective object-language L. (In order to avoid unwelcome results due to the limited expressive power of L, the variables should not only range over the actual expressions of L, but also over expressions in possible extensions of L.) Then we can define

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[6] Where antisymmetry is defined as follows:

$$R \text{ is } antisymmetric \quad \leftrightarrow_{\text{df.}} \forall x \forall y \, ((x \text{ stands in } R \text{ to } y \,\&\, x \neq y)$$
$$\rightarrow \neg y \text{ stands in } R \text{ to } x)$$

[7] Cp., for instance, Caputo (2007: 282), as well as Bolzano (1837: §209), Correia (2005: 63), and Tatzel (2002: 17) (the latter three take 'because' to express an asymmetric relation of grounding).

[8] Grice (1967/87: 67), for instance, characterizes the symmetry of connectives (he speaks of 'commutativity') in this way.

asymmetry of dyadic sentential connectives as follows:

$$\text{`} \vartriangleright \text{' is } asymmetrical \leftrightarrow_{df.} \forall p \forall p* : (p \vartriangleright q) \rightarrow \neg(q \vartriangleright p)$$

(The sign '$\vartriangleright$' can be regarded as a substitutional variable whose substitution class are the two-place sentential connectives.)

In the same vein, we can define irreflexivity for dyadic sentential connectives:

$$\text{`} \vartriangleright \text{' is } irreflexive \leftrightarrow_{df.} \forall p \ \neg(p \vartriangleright p)$$

This definition in terms of substitutional quantification is equivalent to a characterisation via instances of a schema, such that, e.g., the connective '$\blacktriangledown$' is called irreflexive iff every instance of the schema '$\neg(p \blacktriangledown p)$' is true.[9]

Now, I already mentioned that many philosophers take 'because' to be asymmetrical. That view is intimately related to the thesis of the so-called *asymmetry of explanation*. Even though talk about the asymmetry of explanation is somewhat vague, it is clear that at least sometimes a general feature of explanations is aimed at, which could be put as follows:

For any x and y: 'if x explains y, then y does not explain x.'[10]

Since 'because'-sentences are typically used to give explanations, one should expect the asymmetry of 'because' if one accepts the asymmetry of explanation.

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[9] Philosophers who talk about structural properties of 'because' by using a similar approach include, for instance: Schnieder (2004a: 420), who takes 'because' to be asymmetrical; Lowe (1998: 145), who takes 'because' to be at least anti-symmetrical, staying agnostic about its irreflexivity; Künne (2003: 230) and Mulligan (2006: 38), who explicitly hold 'because' to be irreflexive; Sharvy (1986: 513f.), who argues that Plato relied on the asymmetry of 'because' (or rather its Greek counterpart, i.e. 'ὅτι').

[10] Quoted from Dowe (2000: 167). For similarly explicit formulations of such a general thesis see, for instance, Bird (2003: 301) or Newton-Smith (2000: 128). Notice, however, that some philosophers in the debate about explanation talk about the asymmetry of explanation without aiming at such a general claim; some of them have the much weaker claim in mind that there are at least certain important types of explanations which cannot be reversed. This is in particular true for the debate around the DN-model of explanation and its rivals. Thus, for instance, both Kitcher (1981: 522) and Barnes (1992: 560) describe the asymmetry in somewhat weak terms which might indicate that they would be willing to allow for exceptions (though they do not say so). Woodward (1984: 436–42) explicitly doubts that explanation is constitutively asymmetrical, while he acknowledges that many or even most typical explanations are irreversible.

If 'because' is asymmetrical then this is certainly an important feature of that connective which can play an important role in philosophical arguments. One such argument appears in the already mentioned *Euthyphro*. After understanding that he is meant to give a general account of piety, Euthyphro proposes that the pious is the god-beloved. But that proposal would commit him to accept that pious things are pious because they are god-beloved — whereas Socrates makes Euthyphro see that his own intuitions speak for the opposite direction of explanation. For, Euthyphro's gods are beings with a mental makeup comparable to ours; but their intellectual capacities are much greater than ours, and they let their affections be governed by their judgements on what is good or bad.[11] Hence, they should have a reason for loving the pious things, and that reason is just that those things are pious. Euthyphro therefore makes the concession that the gods love the pious things because they are pious. But we have seen that Euthyphro's analysis would imply the truth of the converse explanation that pious things are pious because they are god-beloved, and due to the asymmetry of 'because' we cannot have the explanations running both ways. Hence, Euthyphro's analysis must be mistaken — or so goes the core of Socrates' argument.

c. The Objects of Explanation

As has been mentioned above, it is often said that 'because' expresses a relation. That relation (usually called 'the relation of explanation', or 'the explanatory relation') is supposed to hold between an explaining entity and an entity to be explained. So, in as much as we take 'because' to express such a relation, the question arises as to what kind of relata that relation relates. In other words: what are the objects of explanation?

To prepare for an answer, we should briefly get clearer on what it may mean that a sentential connective, such as 'because', expresses a relation. A minimal thesis that philosophers usually have in mind here is that the truth-conditions of a 'because'-sentence should be stateable in terms of the explanatory relation, where the relevant relata should somehow be introduced by the clauses that are concatenated with 'because'.

Since the truth-conditions of sentences can be stated in different and non-synonymous ways, some philosophers will take the said condition only to be necessary for a term's expressing a relation. For, on some use of 'express', to express a relation is a privileged semantic feature of an expression at the

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[11] See, in particular, *Euthyphro*, Stephanus pages 7a–8a.

heart of its meaning, such that some truth-conditions stateable in terms of the relation must reveal the meaning of the operator.[12]

But for the present purpose, we may work with a less demanding sense of 'express' and take the specified necessary condition for expressing a relation also to be a sufficient one (this is, indeed, a very liberal sense since it allows that one and the same connective can express more than one relation). Then we can say, more precisely and on a more general level, that

A two-place sentential connective C expresses the relation R iff

$\exists f \forall S \forall S^* : S^\frown C^\frown S^*$ is true iff R holds between $f(S)$ and $f(S^*)$.

(Where 'f' ranges over functions, 'S' and 'S^*' range over sentences, and '$^\frown$' is the sign of concatenation.)

With this account we can, for instance, classify any two-place truth-functional connective C as relational, because we can state the truth-conditions of $S^\frown C^\frown S^*$ in terms of a relation holding between the truth-value of S and the truth-value of S^*.

Let us now return to the question of what the objects of explanation are. There are some locutions that may, though only at first glance, suggest that such objects are truth-values; for, we sometimes say that the truth of a sentence requires an explanation and that something accounts for, or explains, the truth of some statement. However, in the sense defined above, the objects of the explanatory relation are clearly not truth-values, since 'because' is not a truth-functional operator. But assume C is an operator which is not truth-functional. Then there are sentences S and S^* agreeing in truth-value, and some sentence $S^\frown C^\frown S^*$ or $S^{*\frown} C^\frown S$ such that substituting S^* for S changes the truth-value of the sentence. Hence, the truth-conditions of $S^\frown C^\frown S^*$ cannot be stated in terms of a relation holding between the truth-values of S and S^*. Examples in the case of 'because' would be the sentences

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[12] There is, by the way, at least some linguistic evidence that 'because' may express a relation even in this more demanding sense (i.e. such that the relation should indeed feature in meaning-revealing truth-conditions for 'because'-sentences). For, etymologically, the sentential connective 'because' derives by contraction from 'by cause', a phrase consisting of a preposition and the noun 'cause' (cp. OED; the following quotations are taken from *OED Online*). Like 'because', that phrase required a sentence as its first argument, which determines what is to be explained. Contrary to 'because', however, the phrase did not take a sentence as its second argument; rather, it accepted a 'why'-clause or a 'that'-clause (e.g. 'By cause that he was hire Neighebour') or it was followed by 'of' together with some other singular term. In a transition phase, 'because' was used in the same way (e.g. 'The Holy Ghost was not yet giuen; because that Iesus was not yet glorified'), while 'by cause' already appeared as a sentential connective ('By cause I am a burel man. Haue me excused of my rude speche').

(1) Chernobyl exploded because there were deficiencies in the reactor design and in the operating regulations.

(2) Chernobyl exploded because the Berlin wall fell in 1989.

Since 'because' is moreover a hyper-intensional connective, the objects of explanation cannot be Carnapian intensions either. Sentences S and S^* are intensionally equivalent iff they have the same truth-value with respect to every possible world. A sentential connective C is hyper-intensional if there are intensionally equivalent sentences S and S^* which cannot be substituted *salva veritate* as arguments of C. The hyper-intensionality of 'because' is illustrated by examples such as:

(3) That snow is white is true because snow is white.

(4) Snow is white because snow is white.

Sentence (4) results from substituting

(5) That snow is white is true.

with the intensionally equivalent sentence

(6) Snow is white.

But while (3) is acknowledged to be true by the majority of philosophers working on truth,[13] (4) is obviously false because of the irreflexivity of 'because'.

The example also leads the way to a promising account of the objects of explanation. The sentences (5) and (6), though intensionally equivalent, do not express the same content, for (5) is concerned with the notion of truth while (6) is not. In claiming that (5) and (6) differ in content, one relies on a notion of content individuated in a fine-grained way which is sensitive to even minor differences in meaning (taking into account the composition of the sentence in question). And it is such contents (which may be called facts, propositions, or Fregean senses) that are plausibly the relata of the relation of explanation.

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[13] For some recent attempts to justify the validity of the schema 'that p is true because p' see, for instance, Künne (2003: 150–57), Hornsby (2005: 43f.), Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005), or Schnieder (2006).

Liggins (2008: 189) seems to suggest that 'because' could only sensibly be said to express a relation between contents (propositions) if the clauses in a 'because'-sentence *referred* to propositions (which they arguably don't). However, on the currently discussed explication of expressing, the relation between the clause and the entity introduced as a relatum need not be reference; it only has to be some systematic semantic relation. The semantic relation which is relevant in our case and which holds between the clauses of a 'because'-sentence and the relata introduced for the relation is that between a sentence and its content. It can be specified as follows: a clause S of a 'because'-sentence contributes as a relatum for the explanatory relation the referent of the nominalised expression $\ulcorner$the proposition that $S\urcorner$.

d. Tying Some Knots

Let me briefly show how certain aspects of the three claims about 'because' can be brought to bear on each other.

First, as has been mentioned earlier, there seem to be several *kinds* of explanation that differ in interesting respects. But even if that much is agreed, it remains to be seen whether talk about different kinds of explanation can be fruitfully cashed out.

It is important to notice that the distinction is not concerned with the *topic* of the explanations. For, first of all, the distinction is not based on what *things* the explanations are about, such that a causal explanation would be one which is concerned with entities from the causal order. Non-causal, analytic explanations can be given about any entity whatsoever, including things that are causes and effects, i.e. events. We may ask, for instance, about a certain event what makes it persist over a period of time, what makes it the sort of event it is (e.g. a catastrophe), or even what makes it the cause of another event. Perhaps, some such questions have no answers (because some facts are fundamental, unexplainable facts), but in general such questions make perfect sense.

Moreover, a causal explanation need not *mention* causality in any way. The following is a typical example of a causal explanation:

(7) The Titanic sank because it collided with an iceberg.

But sentence (7) does not *say* that the collision was the cause of the sinking. Certainly, that the explanation is a causal one has something to do with the fact that the collision caused the sinking; but it is not that this very fact is reported in (7). It is reported in the non-synonymous sentence:

(8) The collision of the Titanic with an iceberg caused it to sink.

Now for a positive proposal: what makes something a causal explanation, I suggest, is not that it is itself a fact about causes, but that it is *grounded* in such a fact. In other words, what makes (7) a causal explanation is the truth of the following meta-explanation:

(9) (7) is true because (8) is true.

(Notice that the meta-linguistic character of (9) is inessential for what is at issue; we might get the same point across, for instance, by 'That the Titanic sank because it collided with an iceberg is true because the collision caused the Titanic to sink', or 'That the Titanic's collision with an iceberg caused the Titanic to sink makes it true that the Titanic sank because it collided with an iceberg'.)

Similarly, what makes something an analytic explanation is that it is grounded in a fact about analyses (of some sort). I suggest, therefore, to distinguish explanations from *their grounds* and to use this distinction in order to explain what distinguishes different kinds of explanation.

Notice that the proposal does not imply that there are different relations expressed by 'because'. It is rather that the explanatory relation, expressed by 'because', can hold because of certain other relations. Not any relation will do. In making 'because'-statements, we aim at reporting priorities in the world; it is those relations that can ground the explanatory relation. In combination with the claim that 'because' operates on content, this proposal opens a possibility of how to understand the semantics of 'because':

$\forall S \forall S^* : \ulcorner S$ because $S^* \urcorner$ is true iff
$\quad \exists R$ (R is a priority relation & R holds between the content of S and the content of S^*).

Given that this proposal is on the right track, one of the most important tasks for a comprehensive theory of 'because' would be to develop an account of the relevant priority relations. But this must be delegated to future research.

A second point I want to briefly address is that the asymmetry thesis, in its formulation via inferential relations, may seem prone to simple counterexamples because of the irregularities of natural language.[14] For, assume Herby wants to blow up a bank (a financial institute) that is located on a river bank. Since he uses too much dynamite, he inadvertently blows up the riverbank by blowing up the bank. Hence, it is true that

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[14] Cp. Strawson's (1957: 90f.) comments on Quine's characterization of logical truth.

(10) The bank got destroyed because the bank got destroyed.

But this is a sentence of the form 'p because p' which, as many authors
assure us, can never be true (Mulligan speaks in such cases of the 'because'
of the exasperated adult; loc. cit.).

However, it is obvious that nobody who held that instances of 'p because
p' are always false wanted to exclude the truth of cases such as (10). The
reason why (10) is not a counterexample to the thesis of asymmetry of 'be-
cause', *as it is intended*, is that (10) involves an equivocation on the word
'bank'. But notice that lexical ambiguity is not the only source for super-
ficial counterexamples to the asymmetry of 'because'. Imagine that Herby
used even more dynamite and by blowing up the riverbank with the bank, he
also blew up the opposite riverbank. Hence, it is true that

(11) *That* riverbank got destroyed because *that* riverbank got destroyed.

The spurious character of this counterexample is not due a lexical ambiguity
but due to a difference in referential conditions. Finally, scope ambiguities
can also generate superficial counterexamples to asymmetry. Imagine that
some people were shocked because of what Herby had done. But Herby
never intended to cause anyone distress. So, he was shocked because some-
one was shocked. Since Herby is someone himself, it is true that

(12) Someone was shocked because someone was shocked.

What makes this example possible is neither a lexical ambiguity nor a ref-
erential difference between any demonstrative elements involved. Rather, it
is the possibility to dissolve (12) into different logical forms, some of which
are outside the scope of the intended thesis. In the reading in which (12) is
true, the first quantifier reigns over the whole sentence: $\exists x$ (is-shocked (x)
because $\exists y$ is-shocked (y)).

While proponents clearly are right to exclude cases like the ones described
from the scope of their thesis, the examples still show that the above defini-
tions of the irreflexivity and asymmetry of connectives have to be taken with
a grain of salt. Certainly, it is not too difficult to provide that grain; yet, a
more precise formulation, which need not be spiced up any more, would be
desirable.

A short reflection on how such a formulation might look like straightfor-
wardly leads to what we supposed are the objects of explanation: a rigorous
definition of asymmetry has to retract from the surface form of a sentence
and take into account the level of content. At the end of the day, one can

hardly avoid talking about the relata of the explanatory relation then if one wants to explain in what sense 'because' is asymmetrical.

2. *The Puzzle about the Analytic 'Because'*

Now let us take look at a particular example of an analytic 'because'-sentence which seems acceptable to many ears:[15]

(13) Donald is a bachelor because he is an unmarried male.

(For sake of precision, one may add the qualification 'of marriageable age' to the 'because'-clause; for sake of brevity, I ignore this complication.)

The acceptance of (13) causes a problem if one also accepts the widespread intuition that the expressions 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' are synonyms and therefore contribute the same content to the contexts in which they are embedded.[16] For if this is so, then even though in (13) 'because' combines with two different sentences, it operates on the same content twice;[17] hence, the statement seems to violate the irreflexivity of 'because' and thereby also the asymmetry. Moreover, in the brief discussion of the alleged counter-examples to asymmetry, the important move was to distinguish asymmetry on the linguistic level from asymmetry on the level of content, and to endorse the thesis of asymmetry only for the level of content. But obviously, this move cannot help here.

Nailing down the problem, an inconsistency arises from the three claims about 'because' introduced in the first section of this paper:

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[15] Philosophers who accepted it in print include, for instance, Caputo (2007: 292), Hawthorne (2006: 101), Hestir (2003: 15), Johnston (1993: 330), Melnyk (2003: 142), Menzies & Pettit (1993: 103), and Miller (1995: 853). Künne's (2003: 155) use of an analogous example shows that he would accept (13) as well.

[16] Notice that I do not identify linguistic meaning with content but only assume that linguistic meaning together with contextual parameters determines content. The contribution of context, however, is only relevant in the case of context-sensitive words (as, e.g., the indexical 'I'). If an expression is not context-sensitive, its meaning determines its content without interference, and hence, two synonymous expressions which are not context-sensitive also have the same content. For the present purposes, issues of context-sensitivity can safely be ignored.

[17] I presuppose that the 'he' in (13) functions as a pronoun of laziness and contributes the same content to the sentence as 'Donald' does. If you disagree with that presupposition, replace 'he' with 'Donald'.

a. *Analytic 'Because'*   Correct analyses correspond to true
                               'because'-sentences.

b. *Asymmetry*   'because' is asymmetrical.

c. *Bec-Content*   'because' operates on content.

together with a twofold assumption on the semantics of 'bachelor':

d. *Same-Content-Analysis*   i. 'bachelor' can be analysed by 'unmar-
                                 ried male', while
                             ii. both expressions have the same content.

At least one of those assumptions has to go. (For, a. and d.i. together im-
ply that (13) is true. But from d.ii. we can conclude that the two clauses of
(13) have the same content. So, together with c. it follows that there is a
symmetrical 'because'-statement, contradicting b.)

  Before we begin the discussion, it should be stressed that it is hardly useful
to debate the semantics of the particular example (i.e. the meaning of 'bache-
lor').[18] The pressing question is whether we want to allow that there may, in
principle, be cases in which one sentence can be used to give an explanation
of the content of a synonymous sentence. Assume there is at least one sen-
tence S of that kind. Synonymous sentences have the same content. Then, if
'because' operates on content — that is, if the objects of explanation are con-
tents —, sentence S must be reversible. Hence, the irreflexivity and there-
fore the asymmetry of 'because' would have to be given up. Commitments
to such 'because'-sentences arise once we accept the analytic 'because' and
allow that in some cases of analysis the *analysans* and the *analysandum* have
the same content (note that I use 'analysans' and 'analysandum' as terms for
the expressions used in an analysis, but without committing myself to any
substantial view on what the primary objects of analysis are). And such
cases are to be expected on one popular view on *conceptual* analysis, on
which the *analysans* and the *analysandum* of a correct conceptual analysis
have the same content. (Of course, such a conception is, albeit popular, not
uncontroversial. It is, for instance, said to create what has been called the
paradox of analysis.[19] But this is not the place to enter into a debate about

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[18] One can, by the way, have reasonable doubts about the synonymy of 'bachelor' and
'unmarried male of marriageable age'; see, e.g., Jackendoff (2002: 375).

[19] Two *loci classici* for that paradox are Langford (1942) and Moore (1942). Ackerman
(1990) argues that the commonly recognized paradox has to be distinguished from a sec-
ond paradox of analysis which demands a different solution. Due to its intimate relation to
conceptual analysis, the presented puzzle about 'because' could indeed be called *the third
paradox of analysis*.

how the idea of analysis should best be understood. For the nonce, it should suffice that there is one popular conception of conceptual analysis that seems to generate a problem for the asymmetry of explanation.)

3. *Four Candidate Solutions*

We have distinguished four legs of the puzzle, claims a. to d. In principle, each of those claims could be denied in order to solve the puzzle. Accordingly, I shall consider four candidate solutions.

a. Rejecting Asymmetry

The derivation of the puzzle made use of the asymmetry of 'because' (claim b.). Thus, once we deny *Asymmetry*, the presented road to the puzzle is blocked.

But even though I motivated the problem taking recourse to the asymmetry of 'because', it does not essentially depend on the correctness of that thesis. Denying *Asymmetry* only provides a superficial solution to the puzzle because analogous problems immediately turn up. One such problem arises if one is not only inclined to accept (13), but also to reject the following sentence:

(14) Donald is an unmarried male because he is a bachelor.

In fact, (14) does not seem to be a true explanation. But if 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' just express the same content and 'because' operates on contents, then (13) and (14) must express the same content, too. That obviously conflicts with the judgement that they differ in truth-value, since the content of (13) and (14) should, together with the fact that Donald is a bachelor, determine their truth-values. This problem, however, is independent of the alleged asymmetry of 'because'. To see this, assume that you reject the asymmetry of 'because' for reasons completely unrelated to the analytic 'because'. Then you would still have to decide between the options of taking 'because' to operate on content and allowing irreversible 'because'-sentences with clauses that have the same content (which you are committed to once you accept (13) and reject (14)). The core of this variant of the above puzzle consists in the incompatibility of the following two claims:

Bec-Content	'because' operates on content.
Same-Content-Irreversible	There can be sentences S and S^* with the same content such that $\ulcorner S$ because $S^* \urcorner$ is true, while $\ulcorner S^*$ because $S \urcorner$ is false.

Finally, there even remains a variant of the puzzle if you were willing to accept (14). For, if the clauses in (13) have the same content and 'because' operates on content, then the acceptance of (13) also commits one to the acceptance of

(15) Donald is a bachelor because he is bachelor.

But while (13) seems an acceptable analytic explanation, (15) declares bachelorhood to be self-explanatory, which it certainly is not. Hence, solving the puzzle by denying *Asymmetry* seems a red herring.

b. Resisting the Analytic 'Because'

A second way of reacting to the puzzle would, of course, consist in rejecting the sentence which led to the trouble, i.e. in denying that

(13) Donald is a bachelor because he is an unmarried male.

But the bare denial of (13) is a poor solution to the puzzle; one has to address at least two questions arising from that move. First, if one rejects (13) while accepting that we are working with a conceptual analysis (otherwise, just switch the example for an actual example of a conceptual analysis), one is also bound to reject the claim *Analytic 'Because'* (claim a.). One should, then, either try to mount a general argument against the analytic 'because', or argue that it fails only in certain cases, say, cases of conceptual analyses (while allowing that other analyses still correspond to an analytic 'because').

Second, it would hardly be a convincing move to reject (13) merely on the basis of the puzzle. For, as was pointed out earlier, (13) is intuitively judged as true by many philosophers, regardless of any specific theory about 'because'. So, anyone who opts for the current solution to the puzzle should at least try to explain why many people are disposed to accept (13), and why it is false after all.

Some philosophers might be tempted to provide such a kind of twofold explanation by declaring that it is, on reflection, not really (13) that people accept, but a related claim which is indeed true. To see what someone might come up with, we may take a look at a passage from Johnston. For, even

though he affirmatively presents a claim such as (13), he uses a rather cautious formulation:

> [There is] the 'because' of conceptual articulation, as in
>
> (i) Parsifal is a bachelor, or is rightly called 'bachelor', because he is an unmarried male of marriageable age.
>
> In providing such "explanations" of why certain things count as satisfying certain predicates, we are not employing sentences whose literal meanings convey empirical information concerning a relation of dependence between facts (events, states). (1993: 330)

What is interesting for our present concerns is the 'or'-clause that Johnston inserts in his sentence (i): he briefly switches to a meta-linguistic formulation, and he repeats the meta-linguistic idea when he describes what the explanation (of which he talks in scare quotes) does. I guess that some philosophers might here find the key to solving the puzzle. The idea would be that when people accept (13), they commit the common mistake of a use-mention confusion. (13), as it stands, is false because it proposes to explain one thing in terms of itself (this part of the reaction of course presupposes that the objects of explanation are contents). However, we can mistake the claim made by (13) for the claim made by

(16) Donald is correctly called 'bachelor' because he is an unmarried male.

And that is a correct explanation.

Even though I find this reaction suspicious, I must admit that there indeed seems to be a temptation to insert some meta-linguistic element when being asked to justify (13). At least, I observed a number of (philosophically trained) people doing it. That temptation, however, can be explained without subscribing to the whole package of the proposed solution. It may rest on the correct intuition that explanations such as (13) can be employed to teach someone the use of a phrase he has not yet mastered. However, that observation alone surely cannot show that when we accept (13), what we really want to accept is a meta-linguistic variant of it. After all, it is quite generally true that by using a word, we can teach someone how to use it. That does not make all our statements covertly meta-linguistic.

Moreover, the following two explanations, which we confuse according to the present proposal, have a very different epistemological and modal profile:

(17) A bachelor is a bachelor because he is an unmarried male.

(18) A bachelor is correctly called 'bachelor' because he is an unmarried male.

The first of these claims is a necessary truth, which one should furthermore — general doubts about apriority set aside — classify as *a priori*. The second explanation, however, is clearly empirical; it is both *a posteriori* and contingent. After all, it concerns the fact that a certain term applies to certain objects. Such a fact is neither necessary nor can it be known without empirical information (on how certain terms are used). For, bachelors need not have been called 'bachelors'. They could have been called 'Fred' instead. The confusion that is ascribed to people who mistake (17) for (18) — or (13) for (16) — is quite a severe one.

Moreover, if we mistook (17) for (18), one should expect us also to mistake

(19) A bachelor is a bachelor because he is a bachelor.

for

(20) A bachelor is correctly called 'bachelor' because he is a bachelor.

But we don't. For, if we did, we should accept (19). After all, (20) is true, not false. It is an instance of the following valid schema:

An F is correctly called 'F' because it is an F.

The schema yields explanations of why terms correctly apply to certain things (it yields true, but partial explanations; we get complete ones by adding a conjunct to the 'because'-clause: '... and "F" denotes Fs').[20]

Perhaps, a proponent of the current solution to the puzzle might claim that we reject (19) because it looks so obviously like a violation of the irreflexivity of 'because' (and that this saves us from mistaking it for (20)). But then we should still mistake

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[20] For a defence of this explanation, see Loux (1978: 35f.) or Schnieder (2004b: 142–44).

(14) Donald is an unmarried male because he is a bachelor.

for

(21) Donald is correctly called 'unmarried male' because he is a bachelor.

Yet again, this meta-linguistic explanation is true, so if one commits the confusion one would have a reason to accept (14), while people rather reject it.

So, once put under scrutiny, the discussed strategy of how to solve the puzzle looks quite problematic. Let us look for an alternative.

c. A More Fine-Grained Individuation of Content

Another possible reaction to the problem would consist in pleading for a more fine-grained notion of content. In our example, the problem arises only if 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' are taken to have the same content. This is, indeed, quite plausible on most standard individuations of content. But could we not have a sufficiently fine-grained individuation of content as to ascribe a minimally different content to 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' (and equally, to every pair of *analysans* and *analysandum*)? Then we could deny the fourth leg of the puzzle, i.e. *Same-Content-Analysis* (claim d.), thereby solving the affair.

However, this reaction might seem quite *ad hoc* unless there are other arguments in favour of the thesis that 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' differ in content. I know of only two such arguments. The first one rests on an observation by Benson Mates (1950). In a version adapted from Künne (2003: 369f.), it runs as follows: let us use 'content' such that the content expressed by a sentence is something that can be believed, doubted, etc. Now assume the sentences

(22) Donald is a bachelor.

and

(23) Donald is an unmarried male.

are strictly synonymous — that is, they have exactly the same linguistic meaning. Then the following sentences should also by synonymous (because they result from one another by substitution of synonymous expressions):

(24) Whoever believes that Donald is a bachelor, believes that Donald is a bachelor.

(25) Whoever believes that Donald is a bachelor, believes that Donald is an unmarried male.

But someone can apparently take a different stance towards what is expressed by (24) and what is expressed by (25): while nobody would ever doubt that (24), one may indeed doubt that (25) (or so the argument goes). But if contents are what is believed, doubted, etc. and one can believe the content of (24) while not believing the content of (25), then those sentences must differ in content. The upshot of the argument would be that there is a notion of content such that sameness of content is not guaranteed by sameness of linguistic meaning.

In fact, if you find the steps of the argument persuasive, a similar reasoning will always be available for *any* two distinct expressions of a language. So, the argument eventually takes us to a notion of content such that there cannot be two expressions with the same content.

I take it that we thereby depart crucially from what one ordinarily would understand by 'content'. Content is not a natural property of expressions. Instead, it is bestowed upon expressions by people who use them in a certain way. In principle, one may think, we are free to bestow an expression (at least, if it does not yet have an established use within a shared language) with any content we like. In particular, given any complex expression e which already has a well-defined content, we can by stipulation bestow a new single word e^* with exactly the same content. And such a case seems a good candidate for giving rise to an instance of an analytic 'because': for any simple linguistic context φ, our stipulation justifies the assertion '$\varphi(e^*)$ because $\varphi(e)$'.

But, of course, we cannot *let* two expressions have the same content if we work with a notion of content on which no pair of expressions *can* have the same content. One may well wonder what use such a notion, which is given to us by Künne's argument, can be for us. While I am not claiming that the given reasoning decisively shows that Künne's argument is defective, it should at least cast some doubt on it (for readers who have not been doubtful about it from the start).

Let me turn to the second argument for the claim that 'bachelor' and 'married male' (and, in fact, any alleged pair of *analysans* and *analysandum*) must differ in content. Assume, we have a true report of an analysis, as for instance, of the form

Analysis   The concept of an F can be analysed as the concept of a G.

Such a statement is intuitively asymmetrical. If the concept of a G provides an analysis of the concept of an F, then the concept of an F cannot provide an analysis of the concept of a G. The argument then proceeds as follows:[21]

> P.1   If the concept of an F were identical to the concept of a G (i.e. if 'F' and 'G' had the same content), then the replacement of 'F' with 'G' could not change the content of the whole sentence *Analysis*.
>
> P.2   But then, sentence *Analysis* would have to be reversible,
>
> P.3   while it is not.
>
> C   Hence, if *Analysis* is true, the concept of an F cannot be identical to that of a G.

While this is a strong argument, it still has a weak spot. Premise P.1 only holds on the assumption that the context 'the concept of an F can be analysed as the concept of a G' operates on contents. For, assume that the context is sensitive to some feature in which two expressions can come apart *even if* they have the same content. This would falsify one assumption of the argument, namely that if 'F' and 'G' have the same content, replacement of 'F' by 'G' could not change the content of the whole sentence. For, the content of the whole sentence could be changed because of the further feature to which the context is sensitive. But is there is a reason to doubt that the said construction operates on content? Yes; it is provided by the discussed case of stipulative definition. If you introduce a new technical expression e abbreviating a complex phrase e^*, you seem to bestow e with the same content as e^*. Nevertheless, it seems then plausible that e^* can be used in an analysis of e, but not vice versa. One should, therefore, at least consider whether there is an alternative to the assumption behind P.1, that is, to the assumption that the said context operates on content.

d. Hyper-Sensitivity

That brings us to the last possible reaction to the puzzle: it consists in giving up the third leg of the puzzle, i.e. *Bec-Content* (the claim that the objects of explanation are contents). But how could an alternative to *Bec-Content* look like? Here is a possibility:

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[21] On the following line of reasoning, cp. Sharvy (1972: 125–28).

Hyper-Sensitivity	'because' is a *hyper-sensitive* connective: it operates on *more* than the content (i.e. the Fregean *sense*) of its argument sentences.

Roughly put, 'because' is not only sensitive to differences in content, but also to certain linguistic differences that do not affect the level of content.

Since that thesis may strike some people as initially quite implausible, it should be helpful to mention a different phenomenon that made philosophers hold claims basically amounting to the same thesis. The hyper-sensitivity of 'because' would also follow from the combination of two assumptions that can often be found in the relevant literature:

E_1 Emphasis (intonational stress, italics, etc.) does not affect the content of simple sentences in which it appears.

E_2 'because' is sensitive to emphasis: for some simple sentences S and S^*, the truth-value of $\ulcorner S$ because $S^* \urcorner$ can be altered by a change of emphasis in either S or S^*.

Claim E_2 is typically held because of intuitions about the truth-values of particular sentences.[22] The following are two stock examples:

Case 1. Eve tells Adam to wait in a café. When she returns, Adam is still standing where he stood when she left. Of course, she expected him to sit down while he is waiting. Here, we may want to accept the first of the following sentences and reject the second:

(26) Eve is surprised because Adam is still *standing* there.

(27) Eve is surprised because Adam is still standing *there*.

Case 2. Adam was hungry and the only eatable things available were an apple and a pear. He had to make a choice! Because he disliked pears, he chose the apple. Then the first of the following statements may seem to be true and the second false:

(28) Adam *ate* the apple because he was hungry.

(29) Adam ate the *apple* because he was hungry.

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[22] See, e.g., Dretske (1972), van Fraassen (1980: ch. 5), and Hitchcock (1996).

If the cases are accepted as described and one does not give up on E_1, then one has to conclude that 'because' cannot simply operate on the content of its argument sentences. For, given E_1, the 'because'-clauses in (26) and (27) have the same content and yet the sentences differ in truth-value, and therefore in content. And the same reasoning applies, mutatis mutandis, to (28) and (29).

So, the case of emphasis can lend support to the thesis *Hyper-Sensitivity*. Let us take a closer look on that thesis now: 'because' might be sensitive not only to content but also to how the content is presented. The above examples, i.e. the 'because' of conceptual analysis and the interaction of 'because' with emphasis, would then indicate two aspects of presentation that 'because' is sensitive to: firstly, the structure of the linguistic vehicle (more specifically, the degree to which the linguistic structure mirrors the structure of the content) and, secondly, implicatures carried by the linguistic vehicle.

The first assumption would explain the intuitions about the cases of analysis. In those cases, 'because' is indicative of the priority of one linguistic form over another as far as a faithful and structurally adequate representation of the content is concerned. Thus, while 'bachelor' expresses the same content as 'unmarried male', the latter expression is a more informative representation of that content because it indicates, due to its syntactical structure, how the content relates to the conceptually more primitive contents of 'unmarried' and 'male'. In this case, then, 'because' tracks a priority not holding between contents (since the content of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried male' is identical), but between contents as represented by a certain kind of expression; for short, a priority relation between *contents taken in expression* (which may be mapped to pairs of content and certain kinds of expression).

Here is a rough sketch of how the second assumption would explain the intuitions about examples containing emphasis: emphasis of a phrase can trigger the conversational implicature that the phrase is of salient interest to the utterance. That sort of implicature could be taken into account by 'because' such that the truth of the 'because' statements requires the salient aspect to be of a high explanatory relevance to the explanation.[23] This would

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[23] So as to avoid misunderstandings, let me point out that the present account does not deny that conversational implicatures are a pragmatic phenomenon. But the semantics of other operators (such as 'because') can be sensitive to the existence of phenomena that are not themselves semantic (but, for instance, pragmatic). Compare the report

x said that p and thereby conversationally implied that q.

Whether an instance of that schema is true depends on whether x's utterance of 'p' carried a certain conversational implicature. While that implicature is a purely pragmatic phenomenon, the semantics of the report is sensitive to its presence.

account, for instance, for the difference in truth-value between (26) and (27): the two occurrences of emphasis make the way Adam behaves and the location at which he behaves that way salient. The truth of the sentences requires the salient aspects to have a high explanatory relevance. Adam's behaviour indeed enjoys that relevance and hence (26) is true; but the location has a low explanatory relevance and hence (27) is false.

What may seem to speak against the current proposal is that it makes it harder to develop a semantic account of 'because'; but if that connective just has a highly complicated semantics, it is hardly an argument against the proposal.

Conclusion

Let me briefly take stock. There is a certain class of 'because'-sentences (which I dubbed analytic explanations) that seem to be implied by corresponding accounts of what makes something *thus-and-so*. Since giving such accounts belongs to the central concerns of nearly every academic discipline, it is important to understand how such explanations work. Now, somewhat surprisingly, there are some cases of analytic explanations in which 'because' seems to combine two clauses with the same content. That gives rise to a problem, for given that 'because' operates on content, such purported explanations apparently try to explain one thing by itself. In response to the problem, one might try to argue that

   (i) such cases provide counter-examples to the asymmetry of 'because', or that

  (ii) the analytic explanations in question should, on reflection, be dismissed as false, or that

 (iii) we should go for a sufficiently fine-grained notion of content which forbids the assumption that the two clauses in the examples really have the same content, or that

 (iv) 'because' does not operate on content after all, but instead also takes into account how the content is presented.

Even though it will be clear from my presentation which option I favour, I will leave it to the reader to choose her poison.[24]

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