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A defense of QUD reasons contextualism

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ABSTRACT
In this article, we defend the semantic theory, Question Under Discussion (QUD) Contextualism about Reasons that we develop in our monograph *Semantics for Reasons* against a series of objections that focus on whether our semantics can deliver predictions for some common examples, how we defend the semantic theory, and how we assess it compared to its competitors.

Introduction

Contemporary metaethicists face a choice of methodology. The older method of conceptual analysis, although still popular among some,[1] has been under sustained attack since at least the 1950s.[2] Until relatively recently, conceptual analysis might have seemed like the only game in town for understanding the meanings of key metaethical expressions like 'good' and 'ought'. However, rather than relying on armchair intuitions about meanings, which are vulnerable to cognitive biases and

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[1]See Jackson (1998) for the contemporary classic defense of conceptual analysis. See Laskowski & Finlay (2018) for a discussion focusing on metaethics.

[2]See Moore (1903) and Langford (1942) for the classic paradox of analysis. See Quine (1951, 1960) for the classic attacks on the analytic/synthetic distinction, along with Quine's claim that talk of meaning should be replaced with talk only of stimulus meanings. See Putnam (1962) for famous counterexamples to what seem like analytic truths (e.g., cats are animals). See Williamson (2006, 2007) for a general argument against conceptual truths based on views about conceptual competence along with counterexamples to what seem like principles that could not be reasonably rejected (e.g., all vixens are vixens). If doing conceptual analysis involves discovering truths about concepts, then these objections to the existence of analytic and conceptual truths are reasons to *not do* conceptual analysis.

other sources of unreliability, some people have begun to ask if there might be a better way. And there is: *science*. Although linguistics grew out of the philosophy of language, the science of linguistics has matured on its own over the last four decades, and now *natural language semantics* is a thriving area of scientific research within linguistics.[3] At the same time, some areas of analytic philosophy where considerations about meaning and language are relevant have continued on without significant input from natural language semantics.

Although applying insights from natural language semantics to the study of 'ought' in metaethics has been taking place for over a decade, there is comparatively little work on other important metaethical terms like 'reason'.[4] One way to provide a semantics for 'reason' is to treat the expression as context-dependent in the way that its content differs from context to context, whilst allowing that it does have a stable aspect of its meaning that is invariant across contexts.[5] We call this view *QUD Reasons Contextualism* because the context dependence is controlled by an aspect of the context of utterance called the Question Under Discussion. In a recent discussion, Mark Schroeder objects to QUD Reasons Contextualism and some of the ways that we develop it.[6] In what follows, we defend the view against those objections.

1. QUD Contextualism about Reasons

In *Semantics for Reasons*, we argue that the count noun 'reason'[7] has an invariant character that is roughly captured by something like *favoring*.[8] So 'getting promoted is a reason for Tara to publish in good journals' has a character that is something like 'getting promoted favors publishing in good journals for Tara'. Likewise, 'smoke is a reason to believe that there is fire' would be roughly 'smoke favours the belief that there is fire'. We say 'something like' and 'roughly' because a semantic theory specifies a semantic value for a sentence, and semantic values are often complex mathematical entities that can be interpreted in different

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[3]See Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2000) for an accessible introduction.
[4]See Kratzer (1977) for the semantics for 'ought'. See Chrisman (2012, 2016) for the application of a Kratzerian semantics for 'ought' to contemporary metaethics. See Kolodny (unpublished), Henning (2014), and Weaver & Scharp (2019) for competing semantics for 'reason'.
[5]We do not go into the evidence for this view here. See Weaver & Scharp (2019).
[6]Schroeder (2020).
[7]In Weaver and Scharp (2019), we follow the literature in assuming that 'reason' can be used as a mass noun or a count noun.
[8]Strictly speaking, our view is that favouring is a kind of normative support, and our view generalizes to normative support.

ways. Translating from a semantic value into English is based on a lot of assumptions. Moreover, specific truth-conditional semantic theories, which are a standard tool for natural language semanticists, differ subtly in the semantic values they attribute to sentences. So an accurate translation from a formal semantic value into an English sentence that is not just the same sentence is not something that can be done accurately without a specific formal framework in mind.

We also argue that the count noun 'reason' can have one of eight inter-related contents. The contents are determined by three distinctions:

(i) *Normative/Motivating/Explanatory* Reasons. A *normative* reason is a consideration that specifies why a content, property, or doing is correct in some way. A *motivating* reason is a consideration that specifies why an agent holds the content she does, why she has some property, or why she did something. An *explanatory* reason is a consideration that accounts for why something is the case or how some aspect of the world turned out the way it did.[9]

(ii) *Objective/Subjective Normative* Reasons. An *objective normative* reason is a consideration that specifies why a content, property, or doing is correct in the light of the way the world is. A *subjective normative* reason is a consideration that specifies why a content, property, or doing is correct in the light of an agent's mental states.[10]

(iii) *Obligatory/Permissive* Reasons. An *obligatory* reason is a consideration that specifies why it *would* be unreasonable for an agent *not* to hold a content, have a property, or do something. A *permissive* reason is a consideration that specifies why it *would not* be unreasonable for an agent *to* hold a content, have a property, or do something.[11]

We argue that the objective/subjective distinction holds only within normative reasons, but the obligatory/permissive distinction is orthogonal to the normative/motivating/explanatory distinction. The result is eight kinds of reasons contents: (i) obligatory, objective normative, (ii) obligatory, subjective normative, (iii) obligatory motivating, (iv) obligatory explanatory, (v) permissive, objective normative, (vi) permissive, subjective normative, (vii) permissive motivating, and (viii) permissive explanatory.

Why do we think there are eight possible contents for 'reason'? We are not committed to there being exactly eight contents for 'reason' because

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[9]See Weaver and Scharp (2019: 14-15).
[10]See Weaver and Scharp (2019: 16).
[11]See Weaver and Scharp (2019: 17).

we have not and could not have run all the requisite tests. Our claim is that the eight we identify are what results from testing many of the central reasons distinctions in contemporary analytic philosophy. In the book, we considered a large number of distinctions drawn in the literature and classified them into presemantic, semantic, and non-semantic distinctions using basic tests from natural language semantics. A presemantic distinction matters to the syntax or logical form of a reasons sentence, but not its content.[12] A non-semantic distinction has nothing to do with the meaning or content of 'reason'; rather, it concerns additional beliefs or assumptions.[13] A semantic distinction is the only kind that depends on a difference in the meaning or content of 'reason'.

After surveying dozens of distinctions and concentrating on six central ones,[14] we ran the tests and came up with these eight contents that explain a very large range of uses of 'reason', especially those that philosophers have tended to focus on. In other words, we found that the only semantic distinctions among all those surveyed crosscut one another in ways that produce those eight categories.

Ours is a work of philosophy – specifically metaethics – not semantics. The message is 'if you care about reasons in philosophy, then try this semantic theory as a basis for furthering your philosophical investigations involving reasons. It might not confirm your intuitions, but it is at least consistent with the science of natural language semantics'. Might there be finer distinctions internal to one or more of these contents? Yes; we do not rule that out. Ours is the first theory offered in metaethics so far to attempt what we attempt. We hope that others improve it. Having said that, we do think that the 8-fold structure we identify is indispensable.

Finally, we argue that each of those eight reasons contents correspond to a distinct Question Under Discussion (QUD) in a context of utterance. QUD are devices that track certain aspects of the information structure

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[12]An example of a presemantic distinction is the agent-neutral/agent-relative reasons distinction. See Weaver and Scharp (2019: 19-23).

[13]An example of a non-semantic distinction is the contributory/sufficient/conclusive reasons distinction. A *contributory* reason is a consideration that normatively supports a content, property, or doing, and that may prevail upon or be prevailed upon by other considerations. A *sufficient* reason is a consideration that normatively supports a content, property, or doing enough to hold that content, have that property, or do that thing. A *conclusive* reason is a consideration that normatively supports a content, property, or doing, all things considered and uniquely. These are not differences in the meaning or content of 'reason'; rather, they are differences in assumptions about which and how reasons have prevailed in a given situation. See Weaver and Scharp (2019: 9-12).

[14]The reasons distinctions we focus on are: (i) agent-neutral/agent-relative, (ii) normative/motivating/explanatory, (iii) objective/subjective, (iv) obligatory/permissive, (v) internal/external, (vi) contributory/sufficient/conclusive. See Weaver and Scharp (2019: ch. 1).

for a conversation.[15] This involves aspects like what kinds of things are being presupposed and which standards are in play for dealing with context sensitivity and vagueness. As we understand it, the QUD are determined by the interests being pursued by the participants in the conversation, and it represents one of the fundamental aspects of human conversations: the fact that human conversations involve mutual cooperation toward a shared goal.[16] We argue that the QUD for a conversation in which someone utters a sentence containing an occurrence of the count noun 'reason' determines one of the eight contents for that occurrence. QUD have proven to be a versatile tool for doing natural language semantics, and there is considerable variability in how the details are developed.[17]

Craige Roberts introduced the idea of QUD in the following way:

- C is a conversation that occurs during a sequence of times t and involves a set of interlocutors I.
- G is a function from pairs of individuals in I and times t to sets of *goals* in effect at t such that for each $i \in I$ and each t, there is a set, $G(<i, t>)$, which is i's set of goals at t.
- G_{com} is the set of *common goals* at t, i.e. $\{g|$ for all $i \in I, g \in G(<i, t>)\}$.
- M is the set of *moves* made by interlocutors up to t with the following distinguished subsets – A, the set of *assertions*; Q, the set of *questions*; R, the set of *requests*; and Acc, the set of *accepted moves*.
- CG is the *common ground* for the conversation at time t, i.e. the set of shared presupposed propositions at t.
- QUD is the set of *questions under discussion* at t, i.e. a subset of $Q \cap Acc$ such that for all $q \in QUD$, common ground CG does not entail an answer to q, and the goal of answering q is a common goal, G_{common}.[18]

Notice that the QUD is a set, which can contain multiple questions under discussion. It is a mistake to assume that there can only be one QUD at a time. Moreover, the QUD is versatile in that it does not assume anything about the kinds of questions that might be in play, how they got to be in play, or how they interact with one another. Questions can be simple or complex, and these need not be explicitly asked by

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[15]See Roberts (1996, 2012).
[16]See Grice (1975, 1989).
[17]See Simons, et al. (2010) for an application in natural language semantics to projection and at-issueness. For some recent applications of QUD to analytic philosophy, see Schoubye and Stokke (2016), Grindrod and Borg (2019), Siu (2020), and van Elswyk (2020).
[18]Roberts (1996). See also Roberts (2012).

anyone in the conversation as long as everyone understands that they are part of the information structure of the conversation.

2. Objections to QUD reasons contextualism

Schroeder's discussion contains some of the more strongly worded objections to QUD Reasons Contextualism.[19] A central goal of this paper is to evaluate them. Schroeder begins his objections with the following passage:

> What if the question under discussion is not one of the eight very specific QUD's on Weaver and Scharp's list? For example, what if the question on your mind … is what I think of their book? Or what if the question under discussion is whether there is any reason to read their book? They simply don't say – apparently the character of 'reason' claims is undefined relative to those contexts, and so there is no reason to think that it means anything in the context of this review.[20]

First, in order to get a potential objection to the semantic theory, we need a use of a sentence that contains 'reason'. Otherwise the semantic theory for 'reason' makes no predictions at all. We could try:

(1) The book's high quality is a reason for Donna to read *Semantics for Reasons (SfR)*.

What is the content of 'reason' in this context of utterance? It seems reasonable to think that this is not a situation where we are trying to understand something that is merely explanatory or something that is motivating. Since the QUD is about the objective quality of *SfR*, and it is not about Donna's mental states, we are dealing with an objective normative QUD. If a specific agent were salient in the information structure for this conversation, then it might be a subjective normative context, but Schroeder does not say that there is. So the most natural interpretation seems to be that it is an objective normative context. Sentence (1) means something roughly akin to: The book's high quality really does favor reading *SfR* for Donna. Once we have an example sentence and an example context, it is easy to see that the semantics handles the example without any trouble.

Second, in the quoted passage, Schroeder seems to assume that if our semantic theory does not specify a semantic value for an imagined

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[19]Schroeder (2020).
[20]Schroeder (2020).

sentence, then one should conclude that our theory implies that the word or sentence in question is meaningless. *Nothing could be further from the truth*. Like most people doing natural language semantics, we strongly prefer a descriptive approach. If there is an established pattern of usage, then it is up to the scientists and the scientifically minded philosophers to figure out how to make sense of it.[21] This is our driving attitude in the book. At no point do we say or imply that occurrences of 'reason' that do not get explained by our semantic theory are meaningless. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the entire project, and one that is invented entirely by Schroeder for his own purposes. Although he makes this mistake repeatedly throughout his comments, we will not bother to point it out each time.

We think the source of some of Schroeder's difficulties can be found in the following passage where he tries to give an exposition of the book:

> The central idea of QUD-contextualism is that, of eight possible contents for 'reason', the one expressed in a given context of utterance is a matter of which question is under discussion in that context. They do this by constructing a lookup table that tells us what it is. For example, if the question under discussion is whether or not the object in question is obligatory in light of the way the world is independently of the agent's mental states, then 'X is a reason for A to j in S' expresses the content that X is an obligating objective normative reason for A to j in S. And if the question under discussion is why some aspect of the world could be the way that it is, then 'X is a reason for A to j in S' expresses the content that X is an explanatory reason how A could have j-ed. And so on for their list of six other possible contents.[22]

The 'lookup table' (Schroeder's words, not ours) is *not* the semantic theory. It is just a figure in the book that contains a summary of the outputs of the semantic theory. This figure was intended to be an instructional aid for non-specialists, students, and anyone who is still learning how technical semantic theories work. The summary figure is not the semantic theory itself or even a substitute for understanding how the semantic theory works.

Moving on, here is the next passage in Schroeder's objections:

> Or what if the question under discussion is what an agent is obligated to do in light of the way the world is independently of the agent's mental states – i.e. the question whose answers are given by {A is obligated to j, A is obligated to y, A is obligated to z} – rather than the question whose answers are given by {A is obligated to j, A is not obligated to j}? Apparently

21See Bochnak and Matthewson (2015) for a survey of field semantic methodology.
22Schroeder (2020).

the character of 'reason' is again silent, and 'reason' sentences do not have contents in such contexts.[23]

Again, it is impossible to assess this objection without an example sentence. Consider a conversation where participants are talking about the obligations of a specific agent, Louise, and the topic turns to why she is obligated to take Henry to the airport. Someone in the conversation asserts:

(2) The fact that Louise made a promise to take Henry to the airport is a reason for Louise to be obligated to take Henry to the airport.

This seems like a relevant thing to say, given the QUD. Moreover, it seems most natural in this situation to think that they are talking about obligatory, objective normative reasons for Louise to take Henry to the airport. We have no idea if this is the kind of example Schroeder had in mind because he offers so few details. But once we consider a specific example, we think that the prediction of our semantic theory is accurate.

Schroeder continues:

> Similarly, what if the question under discussion is complex, seeking an answer to whether or not the object is obligatory in light of the way the world is independently of the agent's mental states *and* why that could be the way that it is? Couldn't 'X is a reason for A to j in S' express either a content about objective normative reasons or about explanatory reasons? Once again, the lookup table that constitutes Weaver and Scharp's elucidation of the character of 'reason' tells us no. It is again undefined for such contexts of utterance.[24]

Schroeder imagines a conversation where the QUD is a conjunction of two questions. We can imagine the same sentence, (2), as our example. It seems clear that this participant would be focusing on the former conjunct of the QUD Schroeder imagines, so it would be most natural to interpret 'reason' in this sentence as having an explanatory content. This is not how complex QUD have to work, but we see nothing here that poses a problem for the semantic theory. Once we provide some details for the imagined conversation and the sentence in question, we have an actual example, and we can think about the predictions made for this example by the semantic theory.

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[23]Schroeder (2020).
[24]Schroeder (2020).

The next set of Schroeder's objections are in the following passage:

> So, what then if the sentence that we wish to interpret is 'X is the reason why Y is a reason for A to j in S'? Fortunately, Weaver and Scharp's account can set straight any confusion about whether the two appearances of 'reason' in this sentence might receive different interpretations, since both have to receive their interpretation from the question under discussion in the context of utterance. No wonder metaethicists have been confused.[25]

We never say that we are going to provide an interpretation of 'the reason why' locutions, which are not among the primary reasons locutions we discuss. Nevertheless, Schroeder raises an important point, which is: what happens in contexts of utterance where there are multiple occurrences of 'reason', such as reasons locutions that express second-order reasons? There is no reason to think that our semantics entails that each occurrence would have to get the same reading. That is a mistaken assumption of Schroeder's about how QUD in semantic theories function.

As an analogy, we can consider a participant in a conversation about whether a certain mountain is tall. Imagine that the conversation focuses on two people who have offered evidence about the mountain. One of them is a tall person, the other is not a tall person. In this conversation, a person utters the sentence: 'The tall person testified that the mountain is tall'. In this conversational context, the two occurrences of 'tall' get different contents. In this case, the first occurrence gets a content that is appropriate for a person and the second gets a content that is appropriate for a mountain.

The same sort of thing can happen according to QUD Reasons Contextualism. Consider an example:

(3) The fact that safety was a reason for Tara to drive slowly is a reason for Jackson to ride with Tara.

Here one reasons locution is used as a consideration for another one. Imagine that a QUD in this conversation is: Which person should Jackson ride with?

In this situation, it seems natural to read the second occurrence of 'reason' (which is the primary occurrence) as objective normative. Hence, the consideration in question – the fact that safety is a reason for Tara to drive slowly – is assumed to provide objective normative support for Jackson's action of riding with Tara. But the conversation

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[25]Schroeder (2020).

seems to be about why Jackson would be permitted to ride with Tara instead of obligated to ride with her. It looks like we are trying to understand why it makes sense for Jackson to ride with Tara instead of trying to understand why it would not make sense for him to not ride with her. Hence, the second occurrence is best understood as permissive, not obligatory.

Depending on how the conversation goes, the participants might add the question, 'Why did Tara drive slowly?' to the QUD. There can be many questions under discussion at once in a conversation. In this situation, it seems most natural to read the former occurrence of 'reason' as motivating. It seems natural, especially given the past tense, to read this as being about what Tara actually based her decision on. Further, this seems like an obligatory reason to drive slowly rather than a permissive reason to drive slowly. If the above reasoning is correct, then we can conclude that the former occurrence has an obligatory motivating content while the latter occurrence has a permissive, objective normative content. All the reasoning to arrive at this conclusion is natural, and it involves considering QUD every step of the way. Schroeder's mistake is to assume that QUD must determine the content of each occurrence of 'reason' *in the same way*. They need not.

Schroeder offers an analogy for his readers to better understand his objections:

> An analogy would be helpful. Some say that 'bank' is ambiguous. But the framework of QUD-contextualism allows us to see how to overcome this mistake and see how it could be context-dependent. By analogy to Weaver and Scharp's view, in contexts in which the question under discussion is where, when, why, who, how, or whether to deposit money, the content of 'bank' is a financial institution, while in contexts in which the question under discussion is whether or when the river will flood, the content of 'bank' is the edge of a river. Illuminatingly, this account provides a treatment of 'the bank the teller works at is on the south bank' that is exactly as attractive as that which Weaver and Scharp provide of 'X is the reason why Y is the reason for A to j in S'.[26]

This attempt to show how silly our view is has nothing to do with what we actually say and is instead based on Schroeder's false assumptions about how QUD work. We argue in detail that 'reason' is *not* ambiguous, but Schroeder ignores all those arguments, which are based on using ambiguity tests that are common in natural language semantics.[27] The word

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[26]Schroeder (2020).
[27]See Weaver and Scharp (2019: 24-32).

'bank' passes these ambiguity tests, so it makes sense to think that it is ambiguous. The word 'reason' fails these tests, so it does *not* make sense to think that it is ambiguous. Moreover, after arguing that 'reason' as a count noun is univocal (i.e. not ambiguous), we argue that it passes other tests for context-dependence. In fact, we apply a number of these context-dependence tests to argue that 'reason' is context dependent in certain ways and not context dependent in other ways.

Schroeder continues:

> In general, appeals to semantic context-dependence are illuminating when they appeal to a common core meaning. … Angelika Kratzer's powerful contextualist treatment of modal terms tells us that 'they must not read' expresses in any context the thought that they do not read in all of the worlds that are consistent with some background and preferred by some ordering – differing only in which background and ordering are in question.

> Weaver and Scharp's view is not at all like these, nor does it come with any of the familiar advantages of such views, other than the label of being 'context-dependent'. But by the time the only unity exhibited by a term's character is that of a lookup table, we might do well to wonder why this label is so important, and whether, as in the 'bank' example, the clues that come from the question under discussion are simply what we would expect if 'reason' is in fact straightforwardly ambiguous, and hence relevant (under different meanings) for discussing different questions – as of course is true of *all* pure ambiguities.[28]

Anyone willing to read the book can see that everything Schroeder says here is fabricated. For example, we offer a formal semantics meant to illuminate the 'common core meaning' of 'reason' and how each of the eight contents are related. In fact, we even borrowed from Kratzer's 'powerful contextualist treatment' cited by Schroeder. Our formal semantics displays exactly the kind of structure Schroeder praises in Kratzer's work and ignores in our own, including the worlds, background, and ordering he mentions. In reality, we argue for the following formal relations:

Obligatory readings: quantification over all accessible worlds.

Permissive readings: quantification over some accessible worlds.

Objective normative readings: the modal base is the set of facts, the ordering source is

objective correctness.

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[28]Schroeder (2020).

Subjective normative readings: the modal base is the set of beliefs, and ordering source is

subjective correctness.

Motivating readings: the modal base is the set of beliefs, and ordering source is the basing

criteria.

Explanatory readings: the modal base is the minimal set, and the ordering source is trivial.[29]

This formal system illustrates the ways in which all eight contents for 'reason' are interrelated because each of the readings can be generated by manipulating the quantification over worlds, the modal base, or the ordering source. Again, Schroeder just ignores the most relevant aspects of the theory and focuses his attention on a single summary figure for his own purposes.

Schroeder's next move is to covertly give the reader an example so that the reader can test our theory. The covert example is in the following paragraph:

In order to contort their semantics into a strict form of context-dependence, however, Weaver and Scharp commit to the view that the argument structure of normative, motivating, and explanatory reasons is all the same. So 'the reason for which they rejected QUD-contextualism as implausible' can refer to the objective normative reason for them to reject QUD-contextualism as implausible (even if they did not actually reject it) and 'the reason for them to reject QUD-contextualism as implausible' can refer to the explanatory reason why they did, in fact, reject QUD-contextualism as implausible. The only difference is which questions are under discussion in the context! [30]

Schroeder then in the next paragraph invites the reader to reflect on what 'reason' means in the above passage:

I conjecture, however, that you did not find both readings equally available of each sentence in the foregoing paragraph. On Weaver and Scharp's view, this must be because different questions were under discussion at different points in that paragraph, since the matter of which question is under discussion definitively resolves context ambiguity, and nothing about syntax or sentence structure, which are equally eligible for every context. But there are no good reasons to think that the order of questions under discussion goes in the order that this explanation requires – indeed, further reflection will reveal

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[29]See Weaver and Scharp (2019).
[30]Schroeder (2020).

that it is quite incoherent to attribute the appropriate questions under discussion.[31]

The phrases Schroeder presents are:

(4) the reason for them to reject QUD-contextualism as implausible.

  and.

(5) the reason for which they rejected QUD-contextualism as implausible.

Notice that neither of these are sentences. They are definite descriptions. So Schroeder has misdescribed his own example. Instead, we offer:

(4′) Being misinformed is the reason for them to reject QUD-contextualism as implausible.

  and

(5′) Being misinformed is the reason for which they rejected QUD-contextualism as implausible.

Remember that Schroeder is trying to get the reader to come up with interpretations of the two 'sentences' he puts into his own paragraph. However, in each case the 'sentence' is *mentioned*, not *used*. In other words, the linguistic expressions are inside single quotes, which function like name-forming devices. Thus, this is not even close to a good example to test our theory because we deliberately say nothing at all about how quotation works. In his example paragraph for the reader, Schroeder does not assert these example 'sentences'. Hence, Schroeder's 'sentences' are not examples of expressions *used* in a conversation. They are instead only *mentioned* in his paragraph. So as well as presenting definite descriptions as sentences, Schroeder is committing a use/mention error.[32]

Even if Schroeder had succeeded in giving genuine sentences instead of definite descriptions and not confused use and mention, the expressions he offers are not identical. Small syntactic differences like those between (4) and (5) or between (4′) and (5′) can change how

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[31]Schroeder (2020).

[32]It is ironic that in his comments on our work, Schroeder writes that he longs for a book that would utilize 'a more sophisticated and careful understanding of background issues in the philosophy of language and linguistic semantics' (Schroeder 2020).

their constituents are interpreted. Hence, Schroeder is wrong to infer that there must be a change in QUD.

Finally, Schroeder argues that *because* the reader did not find both readings equally available for 'reason' in his 'sentences', there must be different QUD at different points in Schroeder's covert example paragraph. However, this reasoning is clearly invalid. This is not how context-dependence works. It might be that the reader does not find both readings equally available because the conversation supports one reading over another all the way through.[33] Finding a single example where it is not the case that both readings are available shows nothing at all. Remember that there are often many QUD in a conversation simultaneously, so there is no need for them to shift around the way Schroeder assumes. Note also that he does not say what the supposed incoherence is or which further reflections reveal it. So without anything more to go on, we cannot reconstruct what he has in mind, if anything.

There are still more criticisms of QUD Reasons Contextualism that are focused on how we defend it. For example, Schroeder writes:

> By helping themselves to a stipulated list of central canonical 'reason' sentences, Weaver and Scharp have simply ignored discontinuities between the grammar of natural sentences which can be used to express the different readings of 'reason', such as those that I have exhibited here, with literally no comment in the book. For a volume that aims to reconcile motivating and normative senses of 'reason' to a single context-dependent character, this should have been the *central* task, but it receives no mention at all, anywhere in the entire book.[34]

Again Schroeder flatly ignores large portions of our project. We spend considerable time arguing that normative and motivating readings of 'reason' can be reconciled into a single semantic theory. Our arguments show that 'reason' is not ambiguous and that 'reason' has an invariant character but variable content across contexts of utterance. We also show that the distinction between normative and motivating reasons is a genuine semantic distinction that ought to be reflected in the semantics for the word 'reason'. Hence, we discuss this issue at length. It is Schroeder who ignores everything we say about it.

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[33]Compare a conversation only about basketball players in which the word 'tall' is used. It might be that alternative readings of 'tall' are not eligible in the conversation because it would not make sense overall to interpret these uses of 'tall' as being based on standards for other things like meerkats, huts, or mountains. Is this evidence that 'tall' is not context dependent? *No*. Other readings might not be available in an example conversation.
[34]Schroeder (2020).

Overall, there are three main components of the view we defend in *Semantics for Reasons*. The first part is the eightfold classification of contents for 'reason' offered as a starting point for theorizing about the range of contents 'reason' has. The second is the idea that 'reason' is context-dependent instead of ambiguous, and a particular reading of 'reason' is triggered by the QUD structure of the discourse. The third is the initial work characterizing which QUD trigger which contents. Schroeder's objections mostly target the third component. There are no objections to the eight readings of 'reason' or whether the list is exhaustive. There are no objections to the general claim that 'reason' is context dependent instead of ambiguous or that QUD is the aspect of context that fixes the contextual resolution. So it seems like Schroeder is conceding a large part of our proposal despite the rhetoric in his comments.

3. Criticisms of competitors to QUD reasons contextualism

Schroeder not only attempts to offer objections to our semantics for reasons locutions, he also tries to show that our arguments for our view over its competitors fail. He accuses us of peddling 'grossly uncharitable readings' of 'nearly all' the other philosophers we discuss.[35] Despite the fact that we engage meticulously and fruitfully with the work of dozens of other philosophers, Schroeder mentions only one example:

> Just to take one example, they dismiss Stephen Finlay's contextualist account of 'reason' in just four pages in chapter four. The most probing problem that they isolate for Finlay is that his account links the meaning of the word 'reason' to the meaning of the word 'good', which results, Weaver and Scharp observe, in an ambiguity in 'reason', because of an underlying ambiguity that Finlay posits in the word 'good'! If not for the fact that Weaver and Scharp have taught us in chapter two to be so careful about distinguishing between ambiguity and contextual variation, we could overlook the fact that Finlay's book is in fact a detailed defense of a kind of *contextualism*, among whose central claims is that 'good' is context-dependent, *rather* than ambiguous.[36]

We argue that Finlay's theory entails that there is an ambiguity present in certain phrases containing 'reason', and we show that this prediction is false – there is no such ambiguity. Schroeder implies that we make a mistake when we say that Finlay's view entails that there is an ambiguity in these 'reason' phrases, but Finlay makes that very claim about his own view. *Do not take our word for it*. Just look at what Finlay says:

[35]Schroeder (2020).
[36]Schroeder (2020).

> The distinctly normative character of the agent-relativity of reasons suggests looking more closely at the normative part of the analysis, the relativization of 'good'. Whereas we found obstacles to analyzing 'a reason for s' in terms of either 'good for s' or 'explanation for s', an analysis that appeals to both is more promising. Our semantics for 'good' being fundamentally end- rather than subject-relational, 'a reason to φ' *should be ambiguous* between an explanation why it's good for e1, for s to φ, and an explanation why it's good for e2, for s to φ, etc. If 'a reason for s, to φ' is used to mean roughly an explanation for s of why it's good (for some end e) for s to φ, this prompts the question, 'Good for what end e?' If qualifying a normative reason or explanation as 'for s' functions to make salient the intended kind of end, then a 'reason for s' would be an explanation why something is good for an end e salient somehow in relation to s.[37]

Here Finlay clearly states that his view has exactly the predicted ambiguity that we attribute to him in our discussion of his work, directly contradicting Schroeder. It is true that Finlay's view entails a kind of contextualism, and we say this in the book, too. His view is that 'reason' exhibits both context-dependence *and* ambiguity. Schroeder is simply incorrect when he says that Finlay's analysis entails that 'reason' is context dependent *rather than* ambiguous.

If we try to assess Finlay's work by the standards of natural language semantics, then it does not fare well. For example, his analysis predicts certain entailments among sentences of the language fragment, and these predictions are false. This might be what Schroeder is on about when he says that we object to the link between the meaning of 'reason' and the meaning of 'good'. Of course, testing the entailments predicted by a semantic theory is a perfectly legitimate way of assessing that theory, and if Finlay's theory is a semantics for 'reason' locutions, then it fails this test. Our main point about Finlay's theory is that the most charitable interpretation is that he is not offering a semantic theory for 'reason'. Instead, he presents a conceptual analysis of 'reason'. The section on Finlay is intended to bring out this contrast and show why Finlay is not engaged in the same kind of project we are (i.e. providing a semantic theory for reasons locutions).

4. Philosophical methodology

Finally, we look at one of the methodological remarks made about the development of QUD Reasons Contextualism. Schroeder states:

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[37]Finlay (2014: 98). Emphasis ours.

> This is a disappointing way to do philosophy. Moral philosophers don't need to be told what they are allowed to say – though they may appreciate being told how to say what they want to say. And that is a reason to do that, instead.[38]

Schroeder offers no evidence for this accusation, and we have no idea where he is getting this from. Let us be clear. *At no point do we tell moral philosophers what they are allowed to say.* Our attitude in this project is the same as the attitude of those doing natural language semantics, which is to explain the way people talk, not dictate how they should talk.[39] The project of finding a semantics for 'reason' and other central terms of metaethics depends in large part on taking a scientific, descriptive perspective, which some philosophers might find foreign or intimidating. Be that what it may, the goal of the project is to understand, not to dictate, how language is used. Nothing in Schroeder's comments poses any problems for how we have done this.

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[38]Schroeder (2020).
[39]Weaver & Scharp (2019, forthcoming).

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