

Suppose that Alex is calling the ambulance for the reason that Betty needs help. According to a natural and widely shared view, this assumption entails the existence of a reason – often called a “motivating reason”. More generally, there is wide agreement that motivating reason statements, i.e. statements of the form “A ϕ -s for the reason that p”, entail the existence of motivating reasons. At the same time, however, there is also much disagreement about *what* such reasons are. Some philosophers take them to be psychological states, some maintain that they are facts or states of affairs, and others again hold that they are propositions. In the first part of my paper, I argue that there is no satisfactory view about what motivating reasons are. If motivating reasons were psychological states or propositions, then they would be ontologically different from normative reasons and it would be impossible to act for a normative reason. But if motivating reasons were facts, then people acting on the basis of false beliefs would not be acting for reasons at all. In the second part of the paper, I argue that we should reject a crucial presupposition of the question “What are motivating reasons?”, namely that motivating reason statements entail the existence of motivating reasons. I sketch an alternative view of motivating reason statements as providing a certain form of explanation of action in terms of the *normative* reasons that the agent *takes* herself to have. Accordingly, the notion of a ‘reason’ in motivating reason statements is just the normative notion, but since such statements make reference to this notion only by way of describing what the agent takes to be the case, they do not presuppose the existence of reasons. Finally, I address two objections to my proposal. The first is that unsophisticated agents might act for reasons even though they lack the concept of a normative reason. The second is that malevolent agents might act for reasons that they explicitly believe are not normative reasons. I argue that, despite first appearances, my proposal can account for both of these points.