WHY GIVE REASONS?

The first observers simply tried to figure out what was happening. On the morning of September 11, 2001, at 8:19 AM, flight attendant Betty Ong called American Airlines' Southeastern Reservations Office in Cary, North Carolina. She phoned from American Flight 11, which had left Boston for Los Angeles at 8 AM. In North Carolina, Ong reached Nydia Gonzalez. Ong told Gonzalez that hijackers had taken over their flight, had stabbed two other flight attendants, had killed at least one passenger, and had sprayed her and others with a substance that made their eyes burn and gave them trouble breathing (9/11 Report 2004: 5).

At 8:27, Gonzalez relayed Ong's call to Craig Marquis, duty manager at American Airlines' operations center in Forth Worth, Texas. At about the same time, air traffic controllers reported that the flight had made a sharp turn south near Albany, New York. "'They're going to New York!' Mr. Marquis remembers shouting out. 'Call Newark and JFK and tell them to expect a hijacking,' he ordered, assuming the hijackers would land the plane. 'In my wildest dreams, I was not thinking the plane was going to run into a building,' Mr. Marquis says" (CBS News 2002: 47). Veteran duty manager Marquis reasonably mapped the hijacking of Flight 11 into vivid previous episodes during which captors had demanded money, asylum, or release of political prisoners. They had grabbed the plane, he supposed, to hold the aircraft, its crew, and its passengers hostage for concessions. At nearly the same time, Boston air traffic controllers were telling the Federal Aviation Administration's Command Center that hijackers had probably taken over the plane (Duenes et al. 2004: A16). Contin-

uing her whispered chronicle of events aboard the aircraft, at 8:38 Betty Ong reported that the plane was descending. Her call was cut off abruptly at 8:44 (9/11 Report 2004: 6).

The hijackers of Flight 11 soon proved Craig Marquis's reasons wrong. Two minutes after Gonzalez lost phone contact with Betty Ong, chief inspector Kevin McCabe of the U.S. Customs Service was looking east from his office window in Elizabeth, New Jersey. "He was sipping coffee and talking on the phone at 8:46," he later reported to Steven Brill, "when he saw the first plane hit the World Trade Center. Because he had seen how big the plane was, he thought it might be an attack. He flipped on the television, then called the Customs office in New York, which was at the Trade Center, to find out what was going on" (Brill 2003: 1).

A few minutes after McCabe's call to headquarters, Bryant Gumbel was broadcasting for CBS News from Manhattan. He had just heard that an unidentified plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. At 8:52, his first eyewitness on the line was Stewart Nurick, who was waiting a table in a SoHo restaurant when "I literally saw a . . . it seemed to be a small plane. . . . I just heard a couple noises, it looked like it bounced off the building, and then I just saw a huge ball of fire on top of the building. And just lots of smoke and what looked to be debris or glass falling down" (CBS News 2002: 16). A moment later, Wendell Clyne, doorman at the Marriott World Trade Center Hotel, spoke to Gumbel:

> Gumbel: Okay, so you were standing outside. Tell us what you saw and what you heard.
>
> Clyne: I heard first an explosion. And I just figured that it was a plane passing by. Then all of sudden, stuff just started falling like bricks and paper and everything. And so I just kind of ran inside to get away from the falling debris and glass. Then when it kind of stopped, I heard a guy

screaming. Where I looked over, there was a guy that was on fire, so I ran over and I tried to put the fire out on him. And he was screaming. I just told him to roll, roll, and he said he couldn't. And then another guy came over . . . and put the flames out on him. (CBS News 2002: 17)

It was about two minutes past nine.

Gumbel switched to a third eyewitness, Theresa Renaud, who was watching the World Trade Center from her apartment at Eighth Avenue and Sixteenth Street, about two miles north of the Center. "Approximately ten minutes ago," reported Renaud,

there was a major explosion from about the 80th floor—looks like it's affected probably four to eight floors. Major flames are coming out of the north side and also the east side of the building. It was a very loud explosion, followed by flames, and it looks like the building is still on fire on the inside.

Oh, there's another one—another plane just hit. [gasps; yelling] Oh, my God! Another plane has just hit—it hit another building, flew right into the middle of it. My God, it's right in the middle of the building.

GUMBEL: This one into [Tower 2]?

RENAUD: Yes, yes, right in the middle of the building. . . . That was definitely . . . on purpose.

GUMBEL: Why do you say that was definitely on purpose?

RENAUD: Because it just flew straight into it. (CBS News 2002: 18)

Filmmaker Jules Naudet, who had been producing a documentary on a downtown Manhattan fire company, had gone to the scene with the battalion chief after the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center. He was filming firefighters' actions in the lobby of the North Tower, the first tower hit, when the second aircraft struck the other tower: "Suddenly we heard an explosion coming from outside, and as I turned to look out the windows, I saw flaming debris falling in

the courtyard and then heard a radio call announcing that Tower 2 had been hit by another plane. Any thought that this was simply a terrible accident vanished: New York was under attack" (CBS News 2002: 23). Washington, D.C., was also under attack. A perplexing calamity had begun.

When commandeered commercial aircraft crashed into New York's World Trade Center, Washington's Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field that September morning, people across the world began asking for reasons why. Why had someone perpetrated this vicious violence? Why had they targeted the United States? Why hadn't American authorities prevented the assault? Observers quickly shifted from simply making sense of what was happening to seeking reasons for the disaster. Direct participants faced the double challenge of finding reasons both for the terrible episode as a whole and for the specific incidents they had suffered, witnessed, or caused.

On the scene, emergency workers activated their routines without asking too many questions. Only as they worked did they start searching seriously for credible reasons for the disaster they were seeing. New York Fire Department Paramedic Gary Smiley, for example, was working overtime in downtown Brooklyn when the radio in his ambulance broadcast word that a plane had hit the 110-story North Tower (Tower 1) of the World Trade Center. The call had come at 8:48 AM. Within a few minutes, Smiley's crew rushed across the Brooklyn Bridge to Manhattan.

Smiley set up a triage area between the two towers. He was carrying an injured woman who had just left Tower 1 across the street when the woman started shouting "Plane." He looked up and saw the second aircraft hit the South Tower (Tower 2). It was 9:03 AM, just seventeen minutes after the first crash. Debris began falling on them, so partway across the street he pushed the woman to the ground and threw himself on top of her. A severed, burning human

arm scorched his back. "It was chaos," he later reported. "Everyone was running around. Then it clicked in my head. I knew exactly what was going on. I was there in 1993 when they bombed the building. I ended up taking care of a hundred people across the street in the Millennium Hotel. So I knew this was an attack. That's what we started telling people, and that's what got them moving" (Fink and Mathias 2002: 33). Smiley first figured out his own reasons for what was happening, then told other people those reasons. By his account, people not only accepted his reasons, but also acted on them at once. He moved his ambulance to a safer location, evaded the falling bodies of people who were jumping to their deaths from the highest floors of the North Tower, and started into the tower for rescue operations. At that point (9:50 AM) the South Tower fell into flaming ruins.

Soon after the South Tower fell, Smiley was going to the rescue of other paramedics who were trapped in the tower's rubble. That work, however, ended fast. A rush of air from the sudden collapse (at 10:29 AM) of the North Tower picked Smiley up and slammed him to the pavement. He crawled under a truck, thinking he might die in the suffocating dust. Then, according to his recollections, he grew angry as he remembered how his father had died in a random street robbery three years earlier, and reflected on how his own death would hit his two children. Again a click:

> My mind just switched at that point, and I think that's really what gave me a desire to get out of there. Something just clicked, and I thought, I know I'm not going to die today. I'm going to get out of here.
>
> You know how people say, "God had other plans for you." I think it was my father who had other plans for me. He had to be looking out for me, and I just started digging. I don't know how long I was under the truck before I figured this out, but I started crawling my way out of there, digging through the rocks and the debris. Just as I got out, a

fireman who had also been lodged in the debris had gotten himself out. Both of us staggered around. (Fink and Mathias 2002: 34)

With all of his exposed skin burned, Smiley made it to a delicatessen on North End Avenue, where a number of injured police and fire-fighters had already sought refuge. There they heard explosions, and gave reasons for them: "One of the cops thought that it might be secondary explosions. When terrorists do this sort of thing, they'll put secondary bombs around to kill the rescue workers. That's an earmark of terrorism. And at that point you didn't know what to believe. Everybody had lost all concept of what was going on, and everything was up for grabs. For all we knew, they had attacked all of Manhattan" (Fink and Mathias 2002: 35). Still, by that time, many people on the spot were already sharing a definition of what was happening and what to do about it: terrorists are attacking us, and we have to defend ourselves against them.

High officials also rushed to the disaster scene and sought reasons for what they found. New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik had just finished exercising at his headquarters when aides pounded on his shower door to tell him that a plane had hit the top of the World Trade Center. Siren sounding and lights flashing, he and two of his men drove over close to the buildings, where they saw people leaping to their deaths from the North Tower. Kerik sent out orders for a citywide mobilization of police. Shortly thereafter, the second plane hit the South Tower, scattering aircraft fragments and body parts into the plaza below. (Since they couldn't see the aircraft, the commissioner's bodyguard Hector Santiago reported later, "The boss thinks it might have been a bomb. Now you think terrorist, and now he's getting into the groove" [Fink and Mathias 2002: 106].)

Running for their lives, Kerik and his aides barely escaped. They took shelter behind the post office at 7 World Trade Center. Then, remembered Kerik,

I looked back out. I saw the damage. At that point, I could hear aviation and the pilots yelling on the radio that it was a commercial airliner. I realized at that minute that we were under attack. I yelled to John [Picciano, his chief of staff] to get on the telephone to call headquarters, but there was no phone service. The cell phones were down, so we're calling on the radio. I'm yelling for them to get aviation to close down the airspace. We needed air support, and I'm screaming at these guys to get me air support.

They're looking at me, like "Is there a fucking number to call for an F-16?" Like "Who do we call? How do we do that?"

But aviation had taken care of that and closed down the airspace. They had called in the military. I ordered the entire city to be shut down at that point. All bridges and tunnels closed. No entry. No exit. My main concern at that point was that there could be other secondary attacks set up on the ground. They're hitting us from above, did they do anything on the ground? Are they on the ground? My other concern was who the hell they were. Who are they? You know, as all of these events were unfolding, you're trying to put it all together. You're trying to think of so many things at once. (Fink and Mathias 2002: 110–11)

Soon Mayor Rudolph Giuliani joined Kerik. The mayor called the White House, learning that another aircraft had hit the Pentagon and that (with President Bush in Florida) the presidential staff was evacuating the White House. The New York contingent set up a command center near what remained of the World Trade Center, only to be jolted by the South Tower's collapse. They moved their temporary headquarters to the city's police academy on East Twentieth Street. That day's performances gave Kerik and Giuliani national political visibility; it moved Kerik toward nomination as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in 2004.[1]

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[1] Kerik withdrew himself from contention for the job after a few days, as reporters dug into his background and Kerik himself conceded that he had employed an illegal

What Reasons for This Book?

As eyewitnesses at the World Trade Center and Pentagon searched for reasons, they followed an extremely general human routine. We might even define human beings as reason-giving animals. While, by some definitions, other primates employ language, tools, and even culture, only humans start offering and demanding reasons while young, then continue through life looking for reasons why.

Reasons provide organized answers to the question "Why does (did, should) X do Y?" X can be you as you tell me why you arrived late for our rendezvous, me as I explain my winning of the lottery, or the hijackers who piloted aircraft into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. X need not be a person or people; X can be God, evil spirits, Islam, communism, or just plain Them. X sometimes means individuals, groups, organizations, categories, forces, or invisible entities. X produces Y.

The World Trade Center disaster provoked reason giving at multiple levels, including:

- Why did the hijackers seize the aircraft and crash them into the towers?
- Why did the buildings burst into flames and collapse?
- (In the case of a participant) Why did I behave as I did? Why did *we* (whatever the we) behave as we did?
- (In the cases of participants and observers) why did other people (considered as individuals or as groups) behave as they did?
- What causes terrorism?
- What causes violence in general?

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immigrant as housekeeper and nanny without filing tax reports on her. After another couple of weeks' brouhaha, Kerik also resigned from Giuliani's prosperous post–9/11 security consulting firm, saying that unfair allegations concerning the nanny, his love life, and past associations with criminals were hurting the firm. At least those were the reasons he gave: Lipton and Rashbaum 2004, Rashbaum and Dwyer 2004.

Moving among multiple levels, this book looks sympathetically but searchingly at reason giving. It asks how, why, and in what different ways people supply reasons for the things they do, that others do, that happen to them, or that happen to other people—not so much grand general reasons for life, evil, or human frailty as the concrete reasons that different sorts of people supply or accept as they go about their daily business, deal with hardship, pass judgment on each other, or face emergencies such as the 9/11 disaster.

The book you are starting to read focuses on the social side of reason giving: how people share, communicate, contest, and collectively modify accepted reasons rather than how individual nervous systems process new information as it comes in. It worries little about whether the reasons people give are right or wrong, good or bad, plausible or implausible. Instead, it concentrates on the social process of giving reasons. Nor does it spend much time on general intellectual discussions of why things occur as they do, much less on how to resolve broad disagreements about reasons for big events.

The attacks of 9/11 inspired plenty of debate. "There is no disputing," comment the editors of a volume concerning the implications of 9/11, "that the underlying significance of September 11 can only be comprehended when placed in its full context, yet the boundaries of that context are themselves hotly contested" (Hershberg and Moore 2002: 1). Seriously proposed reasons for 9/11, the editors go on to say, include al-Qaeda fanaticism, misguided American foreign policy, peculiar characteristics of Middle Eastern regimes, collapse of a previously stable (if dangerous) world order, and more. All those themes sound quite familiar to me. Most of my own professional work involves sorting out reasons for political processes at a broad scale: why revolutions occur, what causes democratization and de-democratization, why terrorism takes its many forms, and so on. Instead of sorting out such broad political questions, however, this book

concentrates on the social process of giving reasons at the person-to-person scale. Reason giving turns out to be momentous at this scale as well.

Giving of reasons, as we will soon see, connects people with each other even when observers might find the reasons flimsy, contrived, or fantastic. In uncertain situations such as the 9/11 attacks, most people first adapt reasons for what is happening from models they have already learned through interaction with other people. Available models vary dramatically from group to group, situation to situation, and relation to relation. Regardless of their content, however, reasons provide rationales for behaving one way or another and shared accounts of what is happening. They also make statements about relations between the people giving and receiving those reasons.

Look again at reason giving on 9/11 at the World Trade Center. At least emergency workers and city officials had previous experience, available categories, and established routines to draw on as they sought reasons for what was happening. People who worked in the towers generally had much less to go on. Even savvy Chuck Allen shifted his reasons as the disaster unfolded.

Allen ran computer operations at Lava Trading, on the 83rd floor of the North Tower. Allen was also a licensed pilot and a ham radio operator. When he saw a plane flying low south along the Hudson River about 8:45 AM, he was surprised, but supposed that it was approaching Newark Airport. A moment later, however, he noticed the familiar sound of a pilot gunning the aircraft's engine, then heard a roar as the plane hit the building thirteen floors above him. The building started shuddering, debris began falling, and fires fed by cascading airplane fuel broke out.

In answer to his computer programmer's frightened question over the intercom, Allen shouted, "A jet-helicopter hit the building, I think" (*Der Spiegel* 2001: 48). Later, as he and others clattered down

stairways from the 83rd floor, he tried sending out Mayday signals on the two-way radio he carried with him:

> As soon as he had established contact he was thrown off the air: "All traffic has been cleared to keep frequencies clear for emergency calls. Get off the frequency." They thought he was playing around. From the bits of conversation he was able to gather that an American Airlines jet had hit the towers. He didn't get it. "Okay. Planes crash, let's face it. But why into the towers? The pilot had the whole Hudson River, for God's sake. What was wrong with this guy?" (*Der Spiegel* 2001: 55)

After Allen led a group down the stairs from the 83rd floor and exited into the plaza north of the building, a police officer told him "We believe this was intentional" (*Der Spiegel* 2001: 108). A new set of reasons was beginning to emerge.

Even as they fled the stricken buildings, survivors of the 9/11 attacks in New York began to think through reasons for the disaster. Gerry Gaeta worked as an architect for the Port Authority of New York, which managed the World Trade Center. As he later recounted his perilous descent from the North Tower's 88th floor (five floors above Chuck Allen's starting point), Gaeta told how he and a group from his office made their way through debris and darkness. The fire that resulted from the aircraft's impact had scorched Elaine Duch of the real estate department, laminating her dress to her skin.

> Elaine was one of the first to come down. She was with Doreen Smith, another secretary who worked in the real estate department. One of the girls who worked for [Larry] Silverstein [the building's incoming leaseholder] had wrapped a sweater around Elaine's waist to give her some decency. There was a big knot in the back tied with the arms of the sweater. Doreen went ahead of Elaine, clearing the way and ready to catch her if she should fall, and I walked behind her, holding on to

the knot so she would not fall. We walked 88 floors that way. When we got down to the 76th floor, the stairs led to a crossover corridor that was designed to create a smoke barrier. It was about 50 feet long and had a fire-rated door at each end to provide a smoke-proof enclosure. We went through the first door, but the second door wouldn't open. I kicked it a dozen times but it wouldn't budge. I started to think that maybe this was part of the terrorist plot—that they had calculated in their minds that people would be trying to escape, so they had locked the stairwell doors. In reality, I figured out later, the jolt of the plane hitting the building probably racked and jammed the door. (Murphy 2002: 52–53)

Gaeta first thought that terrorists had plotted the disaster down to the last detail. As a trained architect, however, he later complicated the story; he brought in unanticipated consequences of the crash.

At least as they later told their tales, many of the survivors that Dean Murphy, Mitchell Fink, Lois Mathias, and *Der Spiegel*'s reporters interviewed for their vivid books of 9/11 memoirs reported almost immediately coding the disaster they had experienced as a terrorist attack. Perhaps that was because American courts had already convicted Muslim militants for their 1993 attempt to bring down the World Trade Center with an explosive-packed van. Or maybe it was because the U.S. government, prompted by the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Yemen during 2000, was already warning Americans about Osama bin Laden's evil intentions well before 9/11 (State 2001a).

In any case, many survivors also likened the attack to the first low blow of a new war, another Pearl Harbor. Richard Brown, economist with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, was attending a meeting of the National Association for Business Economics with his wife, Cathy, and two of their four children (aged seven and ten) at

the World Trade Center's Marriott Hotel when American Airlines Flight 11 struck the adjacent North Tower. The Browns evacuated quickly. Richard Brown later reported: "After the planes had hit the buildings and we were waiting in Battery Park, I had told them it was like Pearl Harbor. They understand these things sometimes in terms of recent blockbuster movies. I told them it was like *Pearl Harbor* and *Titanic* combined" (Murphy 2002: 110). For interviewed survivors, at least, the reasons for their terrible experience did not seem far to seek. Terrorists had tried to do them in, and had almost succeeded.

On further reflection, survivors and witnesses often elaborated their stories. Kimberly Morales, a senior at nearby Borough of Manhattan Community College, for example, had second thoughts. From close to her school she saw the airplane crash, the explosion, the fire, and eventually the North Tower's collapse. She also saw desperate people jump from the building to their deaths. On her way back to the Bronx: "It was an emotional trip home. I thought a lot about politics. I was really mad and didn't know where to direct my anger. Where were the people in our government whose jobs were to prevent things like this? Were they off in their million-dollar yachts and fancy vacations while we were suffering through this?" (Murphy 2002: 128). The search for reasons led rapidly to assessments of responsibility and blame. Even if unnamed terrorists piloted their commandeered aircraft into the twin towers, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field, someone else's dereliction had allowed them to seize the aircraft.

Public officials engaged in a similar search for reasons, responsibility, and blame. In the course of a widely praised press conference on September 11, New York's Mayor Giuliani placed the reasons in context: "I believe that the people in New York City can demonstrate our resolve and our support for all of the people that were viciously

attacked today by going about their lives and showing everyone that vicious, cowardly terrorists can't stop us from being a free country and a place that functions. And we'll do everything we can to make that point" (Adler and Adler 2002: 9). The reasons—"vicious, cowardly terrorists" who sought to destroy the functioning of "a free country"—dictated the proper reaction, calm determination.

The same day, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell issued a similar first response to the attacks: "Once again we see terrorism; we see terrorists, people who don't believe in democracy, people who believe that with the destruction of buildings, with the murder of people, they can somehow achieve a political purpose. They can destroy buildings, they can kill people, and we will be saddened by this tragedy, but they will never be allowed to kill the spirit of democracy. They cannot destroy our society. They cannot destroy our belief in the democratic way" (State 2001b). The tragedy occurred, according to Secretary Powell, because terrorists with twisted minds thought—wrongly—that they could shake American resolve by destroying American public buildings. In his address to Congress nine days after the devastating attacks of 9/11, U.S. President George W. Bush elaborated on Powell's reasons by identifying the culprits and associating them with villains across the world. "Our war on terror," declared Bush, "begins with al-Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated" (State 2002: i).

Varieties of Reasons

Whether public officials, emergency workers, or community college students, people do not give themselves and others reasons because of some universal craving for truth or coherence. They often settle for reasons that are superficial, contradictory, dishonest, or—at least

from an observer's viewpoint—farfetched. Whatever else they are doing when they give reasons, people are clearly negotiating their social lives. They are saying something about relations between themselves and those who hear their reasons. Giver and receiver are confirming, negotiating, or repairing their proper connection.

Commonly given reasons fall into four overlapping categories.

1. *Conventions:* conventionally accepted reasons for dereliction, deviation, distinction, or good fortune: my train was late, your turn finally came, she has breeding, he's just a lucky guy, and so on
2. *Stories:* explanatory narratives incorporating cause-effect accounts of unfamiliar phenomena or of exceptional events such as the 9/11 catastrophe, but also such as betrayal by a friend, winning a big prize, or meeting a high school classmate at Egypt's Pyramids twenty years after graduation
3. *Codes* governing actions such as legal judgments, religious penance, or awarding of medals
4. *Technical Accounts* of the outcomes in the first three: how a structural engineer, a dermatologist, or an orthopedic surgeon might explain what happened to Elaine Duch on the World Trade Center's 88th floor after a hijacked aircraft struck the building on 9/11

Each of the four ways of giving reasons has distinctive properties. Each of them varies in content depending on social relations between giver and receiver. Each of them, among other consequences, exerts effects on those social relations, confirming an existing relation, repairing that relation, claiming a new relation, or denying a relational claim. But the four sorts of reason giving differ significantly in form and content. Each can be valid in a way that the others cannot.

Conventions involve no pretense of providing adequate causal accounts. If I start explaining in detail why I spilled my coffee on your newspaper—how I had a bad night's sleep, have been worrying about

my job, recently developed a tremor it is hard to control—you may well become impatient. "Oops, I'm such a klutz!" may suffice, especially if I offer to get you a fresh newspaper. ("Sorry, I tripped on the rug" might also do.) Conventions vary enormously according to the social circumstances; given an identical dereliction, deviation, or good fortune, for example, a reason that satisfies a seatmate on the bus will usually not placate one's spouse. Conventions claim, confirm, repair, or deny social relations. They therefore differ greatly depending on the social relations currently in play.

Exceptional events and unfamiliar phenomena, however, call up different reasons why; they call up *stories*. People experiencing an egregious failure, a signal victory, a spectacular faux pas, a shared tragedy, or mysterious sounds in the night do not settle for "It was just the breaks." They, too, try to match reasons to the circumstances and social relations at hand, but now the reasons take on weight. Similarly, major life transitions such as marriage, divorce, or the death of a parent call for weightier accounts than conventions provide. In general, reasons for exceptional events complement explanations with at least hints of justification or condemnation: the company gave me a bigger bonus than you because I worked harder and sold more computers. Implied claims concerning the quality, intensity, durability, and propriety of relations between givers and receivers far exceed the claims tied to conventions.

Stories matter greatly for social life because of three distinctive characteristics. First, they rework and simplify social processes so that the processes become available for the telling; X did Y to Z conveys a memorable image of what happened. Second, they include strong imputations of responsibility, and thus lend themselves to moral evaluations: I get the credit, he gets the blame, they did us dirt. This second feature makes stories enormously valuable for evaluation after the fact, and helps account for people's changing stories of events in which they behaved less than heroically. Third, stories belong to the

relationships at hand, and therefore vary from one relationship to another; a television interviewer gets a different story of a lost football game from the one that players tell each other.

Further, stories truncate cause-effect connections. They typically call up a limited number of actors whose dispositions and actions cause everything that happens within a delimited time and space. The actors sometimes include supernatural beings and mysterious forces—for example, in witchcraft as an explanation of misfortune—but the actors' dispositions and actions explain what happened. As a consequence, stories inevitably minimize or ignore the causal roles of errors, unanticipated consequences, indirect effects, incremental effects, simultaneous effects, feedback effects, and environmental effects (Tilly 1995, 1996). They conform to dominant modes of storytelling. In fact, most of the early reason giving for 9/11 took the form of stories.

In contrast to stories, *codes* need not bear much explanatory weight so long as they conform to the available rules. (When I served the U.S. Navy as a rule-wielding supply and disbursing officer, veteran Chief Petty Officer Edward McGroarty, who helped train me on the job, used to joke, "There's no reason for it: it's just policy!") Religious prescriptions, law codes, and prestigious systems of honors overflow with reasons, but those reasons describe how what happened conforms to the code at hand rather than what actually caused the outcome. Third parties such as judges, priests, and awards committees figure extensively in the giving of reasons according to codes.

When we wanted to copy some crucial and voluminous nineteenth century household records from Milan, Louise Tilly and I had an instructive encounter with codes proposed by Ragionier [Accountant] Ciampan, director of Milan's municipal archives. First the Ragionier dismissed us by insisting that only the city's mayor could authorize outsiders to use the records. When we pulled strings and actually returned with a letter from the mayor, I asked the Ragionier when I

could start setting up my camera. The small man strode to a huge book of municipal regulations on their stand by the window, opened to a passage declaring that "no one external to the archives may photograph their contents," placed his hand on the great book, raised his other hand in the air, and declared, "I am bound by the law." We painfully copied the records by hand.

Even victims of codes often accept them as judgments. David Patterson (whom we will meet again in chapter 3) suffered from the electronic industry's contraction in the mid-1980s. During the decade's early prosperous years, his firm had promoted him from an executive position in its California office to a division headship in the New York metropolitan area. He had moved his family, including two teenagers, into a prosperous New York suburb. The kids made painful adjustments to the move. Then, during the mid-1980s slump, the company closed his division, terminated him, and gave him four weeks' severance pay. He could not find another executive job. Despite that, he gave Katherine Newman a coded reason for his plight: "A policy is a policy and a procedure is a procedure. That's the way you operate. If you're part of the corporate world you understand. It doesn't make you feel better; it doesn't smooth anything, but that's the way you do it. You accept it . . . otherwise you can't work in that environment. . . . If I got back into the game, I'd play it the same way. And I would expect the same things to happen to me again" (Newman 1988: 77). Of course, all of us have cursed at stupid policies from time to time. But, for those who play the game, codes have an air of inevitability, even of sanctity.

Finally, *technical accounts* vary enormously with regard to internal structure and content, but they have in common the claim to identify reliable connections of cause and effect. As he reflected on his futile attempt to kick open a fireproof door on the World Trade Center's 76th floor, Gerry Gaeta supplemented his initial story about the ter-

rorists' foresight with a cause-effect account based on his expertise as an architect. Structural engineers center their cause-effect connections in mechanical principles, physicians in the dynamics of organisms, and economists in market-driven processes. Although engineers, physicians, and economists sometimes spend great energy in justifying their expertise when under attack, earnestly demonstrating that they reached their conclusions by widely accepted professional procedures, on the whole they center their giving of reasons on putative causes and effects. Whole professions and organized bodies of professional knowledge stand behind them.

Roughly speaking, then, reasons why distribute this way:

	Popular	**Specialized**
Formulas	Conventions	Codes
Cause-Effect Accounts	Stories	Technical Accounts

From left to right, the diagram represents the extent to which ordered, disciplined, internally coherent schemes dominate reason giving, with "popular" reasons being widely accessible, and "specialized" reasons relying on extensive training in the discourse. Top to bottom, the diagram runs from X-to-Y matching, in which criteria of appropriateness rather than causality prevail (formulas), to tracing of causal processes from X to Y (cause-effect accounts). Obviously, the scheme orders claims made by givers and/or accepted by receivers rather than any judgment of their adequacy by third parties, including you and me.

All four kinds of reasons commonly do relational work. The most invisible work simply *confirms* the relation between giver and receiver, for example as a penitent accepts a priest's interpretation of her sins and the priest's prescription for proper recompense to man and God in a code that has little or nothing to do with causes and effects. More

visibly, reason giving often *establishes* relations, as in the case of an interviewer who explains the purpose of a survey when calling to ask about preferences in food, television, or politics. It sometimes *negotiates* relations, as when the author of a technical account displays professional credentials to make a claim on a listener's respect and compliance. Finally, much reason giving *repairs* relations, as someone who has inflicted damage on someone else tells a story to show that the damage was inadvertent or unavoidable and therefore, despite appearances, does not reflect badly on the relationship between giver and receiver. The phrase "I'm sorry, but . . . " often starts a story that does relational repairs. Both formulas and cause-effect accounts do relational work.

Formulas identify an appropriate correspondence between Y (the event, action, or outcome at hand) and X (its antecedent), but enter little or not at all into the causal chain connecting Y to X. Cause-effect accounts trace causal lines from X to Y—even if we observers find those causal lines absurd or incomprehensible. "Popular" reasons obviously vary from one public to another, for example as a function of religiosity and religious creed. Specialized reasons likewise vary strikingly from discipline to discipline; theologians elaborate both codes and technical accounts that differ deeply from those proposed by medical practitioners.

Sophisticated readers should guard against an easy and erroneous pair of assumptions: that popular reasons peddle inferior, ignorant, and excessively simplified versions of codes and technical accounts, and that truly sophisticated people therefore never resort to conventions or stories. We sophisticates easily make the mistake because we frequently have to translate our own codes or technical accounts into terms that people who work in other idioms will understand. Russell Hardin makes a necessary distinction between knowledge that a "super-knower" might have available—for example, knowledge em-

bedded in the theory of relativity—and the everyday knowledge of practical persons. He calls for an economic theory of knowledge based on street-level epistemology:

> An economic theory of knowledge is a theory of why the typical individual or even a particular individual comes to know various things. In an economic theory, it makes sense to say that you know one thing and I know a contrary thing in some context. I might eventually come to realize that my knowledge is mistaken and therefore correct it, especially after hearing your defense of your contrary knowledge. But there is no role for a super-knower who can judge the truth of our positions. We are our own judges. If we wish to seek better knowledge, it is we who must decide from what agency or source to seek it. Street-level epistemology is not about what counts as knowledge in, say, physics, but rather [about] your knowledge, my knowledge, the ordinary person's knowledge. (Hardin 2002: 4)

In everyday life, we all deploy practical knowledge. We draw practical knowledge not only from individual experience but also from the social settings in which we live. Practical knowledge ranges from logics of appropriateness (formulas) to credible explanations (cause-effect accounts). Appropriateness and credibility vary from one social setting to another.

Different pairs of givers and receivers therefore offer contrasting types of reasons for the same event. Consider 9/11. We have already seen witnesses and participants offering conventions ("this is war" and "this is terror") as well as stories ("terrorists deliberately crashed their planes"), and have received hints of technical accounts in Gerry Gaeta's explanation of how the crash jammed World Trade Center fire doors. Since that time, engineers and physicists have spent a great deal of time reconstructing how the impact of two aircraft (more importantly, as it turned out, the ignition of their fuel) brought down

two buildings designed to withstand huge shocks; technical accounts of 9/11 have multiplied (see, for example, Glanz 2004). But so have coded analyses on the part of anti-American theologians and international lawyers for whom the attacks qualify as just deserts. Reasons do not vary so much by type of event as by type of conversation—who is speaking to whom makes a tremendous difference.

Of course, intermediate forms of reason giving exist. One form sometimes mutates into another as people interact. In religious communities, "God wills it" stands halfway between a convention and a story, having more or less explanatory power depending on prevailing beliefs about divine intervention in human affairs. The talk of baseball fans zigzags crazily among conventions, stories, codes, and technical accounts, leaving the follower of some other sport—or none—mystified by its leaps from detailed cause-effect reasoning to simple sloganeering. Professionals and teachers often shift between technical accounts and stories as they see that their listeners do or don't follow the lines of explanation that prevail in their fields. Long-term patients and hypochondriacs become expert in their diseases, engaging their physicians in semitechnical discussions of diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. Automobile owners who can't pick up at least some rudiments of mechanics' argot run the risk of being cheated or ignored when they take their malfunctioning vehicles in for repair.

Conversely, specialists in technical accounts and codes commonly devote significant effort to either translating from conventions and stories into their own idioms or helping others make the translation. Paul Drew transcribes a fragment of conversation among a defense counsel (DC), a judge (J), and a defendant (D):

> DC: And after you knocked on the door, and prior to the time the door opened, was there any period of time elapsed?
> D: It seemed like three days to me.

J: I didn't hear.

D: Well, it seemed like three days of it and took so long to open the door. It seemed . . .

DC: And [clears throat] aside for the moment of how long it *seemed* to you, because of your then state of mind, do you have any, are you able to come to any estimate now with respect to real time? Was it a minute, was it a minute and a half? Or can you give us your best judgment. Not how long it seemed to you to have the door opened but how long it was. Just your best estimate.

D: Ah, hm, a minute and a half I suppose. (Adapted from Drew 2003: 918)

"It seemed like three days" could work perfectly well in casual conversation, but would never pass the test of a trial transcript. We catch the defense attorney in the act of translating from the language of convention into the idioms of codes. Watching medical interviews or religious catechisms, we can likewise witness translation from ordinary conversation into specialists' accounts. Still, the four types—conventions, stories, codes, technical accounts—distinguish forms of reason giving that most people encounter fairly often, and can easily tell apart.

Explaining Reasons

My job here is not to provide comprehensive, persuasive explanations of all the reasons that people give each other as they pursue their daily lives. In this small book it will be enough to try out preliminary answers to three questions:

1. Does social giving of reasons vary systematically (as I have just claimed) from popular to specialized and from formulas to cause-effect accounts? If it does, for example, we should discover that con-

ventions have family resemblances despite dramatic differences in cultural content, and that they differ visibly from technical accounts.

2. Do social relations between givers and receivers (again, as I have just claimed) strongly affect the reasons they propose, accept, or contest? If they do, for example, we should find that reason giving between professionals and their clients contrasts sharply with reason giving between spouses, and that professionals who provide technical services to their spouses therefore have trouble finding the right mode of communication.

3. Do negotiations over acceptable and unacceptable reasons differ significantly from one sort of social relation to another, as my arguments suggest they should? If they do, for example, we should notice that on average people argue harder about reasons when they disagree about the nature of their relationship, when the relation is intense, or when at least one of the parties has something to lose by acknowledging the character of the relation.

No one has yet analyzed sufficiently broad and ample evidence on reason giving to back definitive general answers to these questions. Still, an unexpected analogy helps make sense of variation in the giving and receiving of reasons. Reason giving resembles what happens when people deal with unequal social relations in general.[2] Participants in unequal social relations may detect, confirm, reinforce, or challenge them, but as they do so they deploy modes of communication that signal which of these things they are doing. In fact, the ability to give reasons without challenge usually accompanies a position of power. In extreme cases such as high public offices and organized professions, authoritative reason giving comes with the terri-

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[2] Bashi Bobb 2001, Burguière and Grew 2001, Fitch 1998, Gould 2003, Schwartz 1975, Scott 1990, Tilly 2001.

tory.[3] Whatever else happens in the giving of reasons, givers and receivers are negotiating definitions of their equality or inequality.

Here are some possibilities that the analogy between negotiation of inequality and reason giving suggests:

- Within their own jurisdictions, professional givers promote and enforce the priority of codes and technical accounts over conventions and stories.
- In particular, professional givers generally become skilled at translating conventions and stories into their preferred idioms, and at coaching other people to collaborate in that translation.
- Hence the greater the professionalization of knowledge in any social setting, the greater the predominance of codes and technical accounts.
- To the extent that relations between giver and receiver are distant and/or giver occupies a superior rank, giver provides formulas rather than cause-effect accounts.
- Givers who offer formulas thereby claim superiority and/or distance.
- Receivers ordinarily challenge such claims, when they do, by demanding cause-effect accounts.
- Those demands typically take the forms of expressing skepticism about the proposed formula and asking for detail on how and why Y actually occurred.
- In the case of authoritatively delivered codes, however, a skilled receiver can also challenge the reasons given by deploying the code and demonstrating that giver has misused it.
- Even in the presence of distance and/or inequality, to the extent that receiver has visible power to affect giver's subsequent welfare, giver moves from formulas toward cause-effect accounts.

[3] Abbott 1988; Tilly 1998, chapter 5; Tilly and Tilly 1998, chapters 2 and 3.

In each case, acceptability of the reasons given depends on their match with the social relations that prevail between giver and receiver. Just as people involved in unequal relations regularly negotiate acceptable signals of deference or distinction, participants in reason giving maneuver in both directions: generally giving reasons that match the presumed relationship, but also signaling proposed definitions of the relationship by means of reasons given.

In principle, this interpretation could easily be wrong. If you think, for example, that most people give reasons based on their upbringing, group membership, fundamental beliefs, or deep-down character, you should expect people to offer the same reasons across a wide range of social circumstances. If you think, in contrast, that reason giving operates at two levels—deep, authentic reasons for intimate acquaintances differing from quick, convenient, opportunistic reasons for everyone else—you should not expect to see the sort of negotiation over relations that my account implies. In either case, then, available evidence could confirm that my claims fail to fit the facts. This book's arguments provide you with an opportunity to challenge them by drawing on your own experiences with the giving and receiving of reasons.

Here is what my account implies: Since most people engage in a wide variety of social relations, most people also implicitly carry around elaborate grids of conventions that fit one social situation or another; "Gotta go" can fittingly end a conversation with a chatty stranger who has stopped you to ask directions, but not a chance meeting with an old friend you haven't seen for years. Suppose that Alpha knocks Beta's book off a library table, then speaks one of the following lines:

Sorry, buddy. I'm just plain awkward.
I'm sorry. I didn't see your book.

> Nuts! I did it again.
>
> Why did you put that book there?
>
> I told you to stack up your books neatly.

Each of these phrases implies a somewhat different relationship between Alpha and Beta.

Stories differ from conventions. They rely on (or at least claim) membership in a shared community of belief. Codes typically call up careful matching of the individuals involved with standardized identities—for example, prosecutor, defense attorney, judge, juror, defendant, and plaintiff—as well as relations among those identities. Technical accounts assume the auditor's belief in the reason-giver's competence. Hence the technical specialist's frequent display of authoritative markers: titles, certificates, white coats, professional tools, formidable desks.

In an extraordinary book about illness that will serve us well later on, Anatole Broyard describes waiting for the Boston urologist who would first diagnose his ultimately fatal prostate cancer:

> While I waited I subjected the doctor to a preliminary semiotic scrutiny. Sitting in his office, I read his signs. The diplomas I took for granted: What interested me was the fact that the room was furnished with taste. There were well-made, well-filled bookcases, an antique desk and chairs, a reasonable Oriental rug on the floor. A window opened one entire wall of the office to the panorama of Boston, and this suggested status, an earned respect. I imagined the doctor taking the long view out of his window. (Broyard 1992: 35)

To Broyard's great disappointment, the office did not belong to his urologist, who took him to another office that "turned out to be modern and anonymous. There were no antiques, no Oriental rug, and no pictures that I could see" (Broyard 1992: 35). By Broyard's high

standards, the "impostor" failed to qualify as the physician of his hopes. But the story underlines the connections among standing, markers of that standing, and the capacity to issue credible technical accounts.

Not that lay observers automatically accept professional authority. Henry Petroski begins his superb analysis of engineering failures and successes with this anecdote:

> Shortly after the Kansas City Hyatt Regency Hotel skywalks collapsed in 1981, one of my neighbors asked me how such a thing could happen. He wondered, did engineers not even know enough to build so simple a structure as an elevated walkway? He also recited to me the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse, the American Airlines DC-10 crash in Chicago, and other famous failures, throwing in a few things he had heard about hypothetical nuclear power plant accidents that were sure to exceed Three Mile Island in radiation release, as if to present an open-and-shut case that engineers did not quite have the world of their making under control.
>
> I told my neighbor that predicting the strength and behavior of engineering structures is not always so simple and well-defined an undertaking as it might at first seem, but I do not think that I changed his mind about anything with my abstract generalizations and vague apologies. (Petroski 1992: 1)

The Hyatt Regency skywalk disaster of 1981 killed 114 people. That was the largest number of people ever to die in an American structure's collapse until 9/11 took its grim toll. In the press, the courts, professional journals, and general conversation the 1981 debacle generated stories, codes, and technical accounts alike, each feeding the others.

Failed expertise likewise promotes reason giving in medicine. As David Rothman documents, between the 1960s and the 1980s American medical doctors lost their hard-won ability to speak without chal-

lenge about the causes and cures of their patients' ills. They could
less easily issue conventions or codes with the expectation that receiv-
ers would accept them passively. They lost some of their distance and
superiority. Publicity concerning erroneous diagnoses and treat-
ments, lawsuits on behalf of victims and survivors, political mobiliza-
tion on behalf of patients, and the increasing intervention of legisla-
tors, insurers, bioethicists, and health maintenance organizations all
inserted third parties into previously private—and quite one-sided—
conversations between physicians and patients (Rothman 1991; see
also Katz 2002).

Whether third parties intervene or not, technical reason-givers
often find themselves shifting between their own technical accounts
and acceptable explanations for exceptional events. Few recipients of
technical bad news, for example, know enough engineering, medi-
cine, or finance simply to absorb the language that practitioners of
those specialties use to communicate precisely the same news among
themselves. A standard textbook on interviewing for medical students
sets it up this way:

> The first step in breaking bad news is assessing what the patient is ready
> to hear. The physician usually can do this by reviewing the clinical data,
> checking the patient's understanding and concerns about the data, and
> indicating that new information is available:
>
> Physician: Mr. Virchow, you know that we saw a lump on the wall of
> your intestine and took a biopsy of it. What have you already learned
> about the results?
>
> Consider these possible responses:
>
> Patient: Well, is it cancer?
>
> Patient: Could you wait till my wife gets here? She gets off work at 6
> o'clock.
>
> Patient: (silent, stares at the doctor's face)
>
> Patients who immediately ask if the diagnosis is cancer are ready to hear

the news. Others may indicate, verbally or nonverbally, that they are uncomfortable proceeding. For these patients, techniques to slow down the message may be appropriate. (Cole and Bird 2000: 212)

Cole and Bird's hypothetical physician would most likely be capable of giving a technical account of how colon cancers form. The physician in question could no doubt indicate, furthermore, which cause-effect relations within that account remain unclear or contested in the present state of knowledge. A physician's consultation on the case with colleagues generally follows just such protocols. He or she, however, rarely offers the patient a technical account. Although the textbook does not explicitly put it this way, the physician is transmitting a radically simplified technical account through two filters: one that translates the message into a language that the patient can interpret as reasons for an exceptional event, another that buffers the emotional shock of those reasons.

In their professional lives, physicians employ all the different varieties of reasons: conventions for routine problems, codes for their conformity to hospital rules, technical accounts for their consultations on difficult diagnoses, and stories for patients who lack the medical knowledge to follow the relevant technical accounts—not to mention stories physicians tell each other about cantankerous patients they have had to deal with. In some zone of expertise, however, almost every adult engages in the same sort of shifting among reasons. A New York taxi driver can give you a code for the extra fare he charges in the evening, a technical account of his circuitous path to your destination, a story for the music on his radio, or a conventional reason for his failure to follow your instructions. Most of us feel more comfortable challenging the reasons given by taxi drivers than those proposed by physicians. But in either case we are, among other things, negotiating definitions of the relations between us.

What's Coming

Pursuing this insight, the remainder of this book takes up different kinds of reasons in turn. Perhaps ironically, it proposes reasons for reasons. Chapters 2–5 take up conventions, stories, codes, and technical accounts in exactly that order. Chapter 6 closes the book by considering how technical specialists including social scientists can make their reason giving comprehensible to publics that lack familiarity with the technical problems of their disciplines.

Working as a historian and social scientist, I inevitably give more attention to historical and social scientific analysis than to other ways of thought. But I hope that by the end of the book even readers who have their doubts about the explanatory power of history and social science will gain insight into what happens when people in their own worlds start giving, receiving, and negotiating reasons. That's the reason for this book.