

Truthmaking, Truth, and Realism:  
New Work for a Theory of Truthmakers

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## ABSTRACT

Jamin Asay: Truthmaking, Truth, and Realism: New Work for a Theory of Truthmakers  
(Under the direction of Keith Simmons)

Truthmaker theory begins with the idea that truth depends upon reality. When a truth-bearer is true, that is because something or other in the world makes it true. My dissertation offers a theory of truthmakers that shows how we should flesh out this thought while avoiding the contentious metaphysical commitments that are built into other truthmaker theories. Because of these commitments, many philosophers have come to view truthmaker theory as being essentially tied to correspondence theories of truth, and to metaphysical realism. I argue that, quite to the contrary, truthmaker theory is distinct from correspondence theory, and that the former actually undermines the motivation for the latter. In fact, truthmaker theory can be used to argue for a particular kind of deflationism about truth. I also argue that debates about realism and anti-realism are best viewed through the lens of truthmaker theory, which is not—contrary to what many have thought—an essentially realist approach to metaphysics. Anti-realists of various stripes can also make use of truthmakers. The anti-realism of such views depends upon either the nature of the truthmakers they use, or the nature of the truthmaking relation itself.

For my first-year cohort:

Adam Cureton, Felipe De Brigard, Katie Elliott, Emily Given, and Emily Kelahan

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## Introduction

Realism, whatever else it may be, is a metaphysically substantive doctrine. I shall stand by that statement, though I admit that, as things stand now, it is fairly empty. That a doctrine is metaphysically substantive does not entail that it is controversial, inflated, or anathema to nominalists, empiricists, or whoever else might vow a preference for “desert landscapes”. We all believe that something exists, so we all must admit some substance into our metaphysical worldview. So to say that realism is a metaphysically substantive doctrine is not yet to say just how substantive it is. My main motivation for beginning with that claim, though, is to stress that I consider the debates that occur throughout philosophy between realists and their opponents to be fundamentally metaphysical (though they may have other dimensions). Realism debates are about reality, and reality is the domain of metaphysics. To be realist about something is to let in some metaphysics; the realist’s opponent lets in less, if he lets any in at all. Locating divides between realists and their opponents outside of metaphysics is, in my view, a mistake. I repeat: realism debates are about *reality*, and reality is the domain of metaphysics. There may be other important distinctions between competing philosophical views; those distinctions can and ought to be preserved. But the logical space occupied by realism and its competitors is already one of the most ill-defined and cluttered regions in all of philosophy. There is no need to muddy the murky waters of realism further by formulating it in ways that fall outside the domain of metaphysics.

In the pages that follow, I shall advocate a distinctly metaphysical conception of realism, one that is purged of any overindulgence in epistemology, semantics, or pragmatics.

Do various forms of realism and its competitors have implications for epistemology, semantics, and pragmatics? Absolutely. But our task is to avoid trying to understand what realism is in terms of distinctly epistemological, semantic, and pragmatic considerations. As a result, we shall have a clearer sense of what is at stake in the debates over realism that occur across the philosophical landscape.

Not far behind any discussion of realism lies the topic of truth, and my project is no exception. The topics of truth and realism have long been intertwined. While the two topics cannot adequately be explored in isolation, I do think that the two need to be kept separate as far as possible. Many have thought that realism debates just are debates about truth. Quite to the contrary, I think such an equation is deeply mistaken. Realism debates are best pursued not in terms of truth, but in terms of truthmakers.

Hence, this project is an exploration into the theory of truthmaking, and what the theory of truthmaking can do for philosophy. Specifically, I discuss whether the theory of truthmaking is a theory of truth (it's not), and what truthmaking has to do with realism debates (everything). To begin, I introduce the general theory of truthmaking, and present a novel account of what it is to engage in truthmaker theory. I then apply that theory of truthmaking to the theory of truth, and show why truthmaking need not and cannot offer an account of what it is in which the nature of truth consists. Nevertheless, careful attention to the insights behind truthmaker theory will reveal why many traditional substantive accounts of truth are misguided, and where the truth behind deflationary theories of truth lies. While not offering a specific account of truth, truthmaker theory does silence the debate between deflationists and correspondence theorists, and shows that the real debate over truth should be waged between deflationists and primitivists.

Next I take up the topic of realism, and argue for its theoretical autonomy from the debate over the nature of truth. Realism debates are debates about what makes things true, not about what truth is. I thus offer a new understanding of what is at stake in realism debates, and how they should be conducted. To offer a concrete application, I apply the methodology to metaethics, and show how thinking about truthmakers can clear up some standing puzzles in the arena. Specifically, I tackle the problem of creeping minimalism, and show how the truthmaker approach to realism can help reveal what is really at stake in the debate over moral realism.

In the final chapter, I turn to scientific realism. As in the realism debate in metaethics, the realism debate in the philosophy of science is sometimes thought to turn on the nature of truth. I think this move is mistaken, and in turn show how understanding the debate in terms of truthmaking better captures what is most important to the debate. In addition to showing how my “metaphysical paradigm” for understanding the question of scientific realism best captures the essence of traditional realist and anti-realist views, I apply it to the burgeoning topic of structural realism, which is now reaching its heyday in the philosophy of science.

Before commencing with the heart of the text, let me make a few notational points:

- (1) In accord with my methodological preference for neutrality wherever possible, I resist taking a stand on the question whether propositions, sentences, statements, or what have you are the (primary) bearers of truth. (Personally, I prefer pluralism about truth-bearers, and would rather dismiss the question of which kind is primary. But that issue will not be taken up here.) In many cases I wish simply to refer neutrally to *truths*. To do so, I will sometimes use a full sentence in italics. For example, in discussing the truth that snow is white, I may refer to it as in the following: Tarski’s favorite truth was *that snow is white*. This notation is intended to be neutral between whether that truth is a proposition, sentence, statement, or what have you.
- (2) Following common usage, I use ‘<*p*>’ as shorthand for ‘the proposition that *p*’.

- (3) At times during the project it will be important to distinguish between, at a minimum, concepts and properties. Concepts are denoted by words in all small capitals. For example, the concept of truth will sometimes be denoted by ‘TRUTH’. Universals are sometimes denoted by italicized words. If there were a truth universal, it would be referred to by ‘*truth*’. Context will make clear when italicized words indicate universals, and when they do not. Properties (in the “abundant” sense of Lewis 1983 as classes of objects) are referred to by underlined words, as in ‘mass’ and ‘charge’. Notation for tropes and other interesting metaphysical creatures will appear on an *ad hoc* basis.
- (4) Most citations should be self-explanatory. In the case of historical quotations with traditional line numbering, I include the contemporary page reference of the edition I am using followed by the standard reference.
- (5) Finally, unless otherwise noted by me, all emphases in quotations are found in the original.

## 1. Truthmaking and Truthmakers

What is truthmaker theory, and what use is it to metaphysics? A rich industry on truthmaking has emerged in metaphysics in recent years; my aim is to propose a novel approach to truthmaking that can be brought to bear on questions that arise in various areas of philosophy. In this chapter, I introduce the theory of truthmaking,<sup>1</sup> and present my approach to the topic that will inform the rest of the project. I begin by giving an account of what I take truthmaker theory to be, and what the desiderata are that a successful theory of truthmaking must meet. I give three such desiderata, and then go on to examine the various ways that they have been satisfied in the literature. I offer my own take of just what it is to be a truthmaker (a thing that necessitates and grounds synthetic truths), and a novel, more pragmatic answer to the question of how wide truthmaking considerations ought to be applied. To conclude, I consider whether truthmaker theory should be thought of as being “explanatory” (and what that might even mean). There is also an appendix that contrasts truthmaker theory with truth-conditional theories of meaning.

### 1.1. Background and theoretical desiderata

Just what the basic driving idea is behind truthmaker theory is a matter of some controversy. It is customary, if not a little clichéd, to begin discussions of truthmaking by citing Aristotle, so let us follow suit. In the *Categories*, Aristotle discusses various notions of

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<sup>1</sup>In what follows, I use phrases such as ‘truthmaker theory’, ‘theory of truthmakers’, and ‘theory of truthmaking’ more or less interchangeably when talking broadly about the territory of truthmakers. Context will make clear when I am engaged in more specific inquiries such as what truthmakers there are or what the truthmaking relation is.

priority. On one conception of priority, “when, among things that reciprocate in implication of being, one is in some way the cause of the being of the other, it might reasonably be said to be naturally prior” (1995: 11; 14b12-14).<sup>2</sup> Aristotle goes on to say that if a man is, then a statement that says that the man is is true; conversely, if a statement that a man is is true, then a man is. It might be tempting to think that the significance of Aristotle’s remarks here lies in the fact that he has offered some of the first instances of T-sentences ever to appear in print. Aristotle seems, in effect, to be endorsing one of the many truth schemas, here involving statements:

(**T<sub>1</sub>**) The statement that  $p$  is true if and only if  $p$ .

While I think that Aristotle would certainly grant the truth of the instances of **T<sub>1</sub>**, the biconditionals themselves are not the main point at which he is driving. He is calling our attention to a coincidence (a “reciprocation in implication of being”) between there being a certain worldly matter (a man’s existing) and the truth of a statement to that effect.

Here we have two distinct matters—being and truth—that nonetheless fit together seamlessly. We can now raise the “Euthyphro question”, drawing on what is one of Plato’s deepest philosophical insights. In the dialogue named for him, Euthyphro suggests to Socrates that the pious is what is dear to all the gods, and Socrates is happy to grant the coextension between the two notions (1997: 9; 9e1-10a2). Plato’s brilliant move is to have Socrates ask which of the two notions is more fundamental: is something pious because all the gods love it, or do all the gods love something pious because it is pious? Returning to Aristotle’s case, we can ask: Does the man exist because the statement is true, or is the statement true because that man exists? Aristotle thinks the latter option is correct:

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<sup>2</sup>See also Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (1966: 158; 1051b:6-7).

The true statement, however, is in no way the cause of the object's being. Rather the object is apparently in a way the cause of the statement's being true; for it is because the object is or is not that the statement is said to be true or false. (1995: 11-12; 14b18-22)

Aristotle is telling us here that being is metaphysically prior to truth. On the one hand we have the existence of the man; on the other we have the truth of the statement that the man exists. The former is *prior* to the latter. It is more *fundamental*. The man *grounds* the truth of the statement. The statement is true *in virtue of* the man. And finally: the man *makes true* the statement.<sup>3</sup>

A basic idea—perhaps *the* basic idea—behind truthmaker theory, then, is that what is true depends upon what is.<sup>4</sup> Truths are true in virtue of the way of the world. The notions of priority, fundamentality, grounding, being in virtue of, and making true are at the core of the truthmaker literature. Whether such notions allow of further elucidation or analysis is a matter we shall take up in what follows. Perhaps they can be understood in more fundamental terms, or perhaps they simply are primitive metaphysical notions (as Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005 suggests). Regardless, truthmakers are the sort of things that are metaphysically prior to their respective truths. Something is a truthmaker for some truth just in case that thing grounds the truth—the truth is true in virtue of its truthmaker. Unfortunately, here we seem to reach the end of the consensus on truthmakers. Different theorists offer different ways of understanding the notion of truthmaking; as a result, metaphysicians disagree in particular cases as to whether something is a truthmaker for some given truth. Furthermore, there is little consensus on how widely truthmaking considerations apply. Do all truths have

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<sup>3</sup>For more on the history of truthmakers, see Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Fox 1987, and Mulligan 2009.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Leibniz: “it is obvious that all true predication has some foundation in the nature of things” (1998: 59).

truthmakers, or just the members of some restricted class of truths? There is simply no consensus on the answers to such questions, or even how to go about answering them.

Any complete theory of truthmaking must contain at least the three following elements. First, there must be an account of what the truthmaking relation is. As part of that account, it must be stated what sorts of thing can stand in the relation. We need to know, in other words, what truths are, what truthmakers are, and what the relation is that stands between them. Second, there must be an account of which truths fall under the scope of the relation. Perhaps all truths have truthmakers, or perhaps only a proper subset of them do. Finally, there must be an account of just what truthmakers there are. We can sum up by saying that any fully adequate theory of truthmaking must (at least) offer answers to the following three questions:

- (1) What is the truthmaking relation?
- (2) Which truths fall under the scope of the relation?
- (3) What truthmakers are there?

On none of the three scores is there anything close to unanimity in the literature. We shall take up each one in turn.

## 1.2. The truthmaking relation

### 1.2.1. Preliminaries

Consider the first desideratum: we must say just what the truthmaking relation is. There is rampant disagreement over the nature of the truthmaking relation, but we can say one uncontroversial thing about it: it is a relation that obtains between truths and truthmakers.

If  $x$  makes true  $y$ , then  $y$  is a truth, and  $x$  is a truthmaker.<sup>5</sup> By ‘truth’ I mean nothing more than a true truth-bearer. I prefer plurality about truth-bearers: thoughts, sentences, statements, beliefs, and propositions (if they exist) can all be true or false. My examples throughout will employ various kinds of truth-bearers. I prefer neutrality as to whether one of those kinds of truth-bearers is primary. To the extent that nothing turns on the issue, I shall take it for granted that there are a variety of kinds of truth-bearers. Some philosophers—notably D. M. Armstrong (2004) and Trenton Merricks (2007)—have argued that truthmaker theory requires the existence of propositions.<sup>6</sup> Consider the truth that there are electrons. Some actual electron  $E$  is a truthmaker for that truth, even though there are possible worlds where  $E$  exists, where it is true that there are electrons, and yet there are no intentional agents and hence no beliefs, statements, or interpreted sentences.<sup>7</sup> In such worlds, it is argued, some *thing* must bear the truth that electrons exist, and so that must be a proposition. I have some reservations about that line of argument. That something is true *of* a world does not entail that some thing is true *in* that world. Our interpreted sentence ‘There are electrons’ truly describes other possible worlds, even those of which it is not a member. So it is not obviously clear that truthmaker theorists must embrace the existence of propositions. My aim is to develop a truthmaker theory that is available even to those who are suspicious of the existence of propositions.

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<sup>5</sup>Note that I shall take ‘being made true’ and ‘having a truthmaker’ as coming to the same thing. D. H. Mellor (2009) advocates a view where all truths are made true, but only some have truthmakers. I find his way of speaking infelicitous, as it requires there being making without a maker. But note that our disagreement here is merely terminological. See also Melia 2005 for a defense of truthmaking without truthmakers.

<sup>6</sup>See also David 2005 for discussion.

<sup>7</sup>I now hereby make the common but necessary caveat: though I shall employ repeatedly the language of possible worlds, my intention is to use it merely as a useful *façon de parler*, with no commitment to David Lewis’s modal realism (1986) presupposed.

As for the other member of the relation, we can begin with what truthmakers are not. Truthmakers are not to be conceptually identified with or restricted to any particular kind of entity; specifically, they should not be conceptually identified with or restricted to states of affairs or facts, in the sense employed initially by Bertrand Russell (1985) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921), and later by the likes of Armstrong (1997) and D. H. Mellor (1998). On their view, facts and states of affairs are worldly entities; they are not identified with truths. (Nor do they stand in a strict one-one correspondence with them.) Armstrong's states of affairs are not Alvin Plantinga's (1974) or Roderick Chisholm's (1981), whose states of affairs are Platonic or ersatz entities that exist in all possible worlds, obtaining in some but not in others.<sup>8</sup> Armstrong's states of affairs are the core entity in his ontology; they are contingent existences. It is sometimes suggested that truthmakers just are facts or states of affairs, that what it is to be a truthmaker is to be a fact or a state of affairs (Sider 2001: 36, Heathcote 2003: 361; see also Williamson 1999 and McGrath 2003). True, Armstrong thinks that his states of affairs are truthmakers. However, (a proper subset of) Armstrong's truthmakers are states of affairs because states of affairs are what populate Armstrong's ontology. Indeed, truthmaking has been of great appeal to those who adopt factive ontologies (ontologies of facts, not of things). And as a matter of contingent, sociological fact, fans of factive ontologies have been fans of truthmaking.<sup>9</sup> But factive ontologies are not necessary

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<sup>8</sup>Where I use 'Platonic or ersatz', most writers would use 'abstract'. I follow Armstrong in thinking that this use of 'abstract' to mean "non spatiotemporal" is a perversion of the original meaning of the term that has played a central role in metaphysics for centuries. (He calls it the "Harvard sense" of 'abstract'.) Abstract entities are those that are *abstractions* from other entities, regardless of whether or not they are located in space-time.

<sup>9</sup>Which is not to say that the sociological fact here is mere coincidence. It is perfectly explicable why friends of states of affairs have been advocates of truthmaking (just look at the influence of Russell's logical atomism). My point is only that there is no conceptual necessity between truthmaking and anti-nominalist ontology.

for truthmaking.<sup>10</sup> David Lewis, for instance, offers a sophisticated theory of truthmaking that makes no use of facts or states of affairs (2003). Others offer tropes as candidate truthmakers (e.g., Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Martin 1996, and Cameron 2008a<sup>11</sup>). Truthmakers can be drawn from any kind of ontology whatsoever; the notion is not limited simply to certain kinds of entities.<sup>12</sup> Anything can be a truthmaker, and everything *is* a truthmaker. Take some existing object  $x$ .  $x$ , plausibly, is a truthmaker for ‘ $x$  exists’.<sup>13</sup> But  $x$  is just any old object, so the argument generalizes. Every object is a truthmaker for the truth that it exists, and perhaps more besides.<sup>14</sup> The world is the totality of truthmakers.

Hence, I suggest that we embrace a hearty pluralism about the kinds of things that can enter into the truthmaking relation, on both sides. Anything that can bear truth can be made true, and anything at all can (and does) make true. We have now said what the relata are in the truthmaking relation. But what exactly is the nature of the relation that they stand in? Most are agreed that the relation is *many-many*: a truth may have several truthmakers (‘There are humans’ is made true by each and every human), and a single thing may be a truthmaker for multiple truths (Obama is a truthmaker for both ‘There are humans’ and ‘Obama

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<sup>10</sup>But see Merricks 2007, which argues that truthmaker theory requires states of affairs. The argument depends upon truthmaker maximalism (the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker) being a *sine qua non* of truthmaker theory, which is something I adamantly reject.

<sup>11</sup>In his 2010, Ross Cameron retracts his sympathy for tropes as truthmakers.

<sup>12</sup>Hence we should reject Joseph Melia’s suggestion that nominalists are conceptually forbidden from employing a truthmaking relation. Since he thinks nominalists have nothing in their ontology to stand in the truthmaking relation to truths, Melia thinks nominalists should take ‘makes true’ as a one-place connective, and flesh out truthmaker theory with ungrammatical sentences like ‘ $a$  is red makes true the sentence ‘there is a colour  $a$  and  $b$  both share’’ (2005: 79). My alternative suggestion is that the notion of a truthmaker should not be limited conceptually to only certain kinds of entities. Anything can be a truthmaker, and everything is a truthmaker.

<sup>13</sup>But see Schaffer 2010.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Simons (2005: 254) presents this thesis as a consequence of truthmaker necessitarianism (see **TM**<sub>2</sub> below), but I think it is independently defensible, regardless of how one conceives of the truthmaking relation.

exists’).<sup>15</sup> Armstrong argues that the relation is *internal*, in the sense that it obtains in every possible world in which the relata both exist (2004: 9). For example, in every world in which Obama and ‘Obama exists’ both exist, they will stand in the truthmaking relation. It would be impossible for there to be Obama, and yet not have him be a truthmaker for ‘Obama exists’. Accordingly, the truthmaking relation is not anything above and beyond the relata.<sup>16</sup>

Many also assume that the truthmaking relation is asymmetric and irreflexive (Hornsby 2005, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, Schaffer 2008b, and Fine 2010; see also David 2009). If  $x$  makes true  $y$ , then it is not the case that  $y$  makes true  $x$ . And in no case does  $x$  make itself true. However, those assumptions are false. Recall that everything is a truthmaker, including truth-bearers themselves, whichever ones exist. While it is true that the relation holds reflexively only very rarely (namely, in some of those cases where truth-bearers stand on both sides of the relation), it would be *ad hoc* to insist on the irreflexivity of the relation in the face of plausible cases. And, of course, if there are reflexive cases of truthmaking, then there are symmetrical cases of truthmaking. Consider, then, the proposition that there are propositions, the sentence token ‘There are sentence tokens’, and the belief that there are beliefs. Typically, an object is the truthmaker for the truth of a claim to its own existence, and to any existential involving one of its essential features. Socrates makes true ‘Socrates exists’, and Obama makes true ‘Obama exists’. Both provide grounds for ‘A human exists’. When a truth-bearer is about itself, its own existence, and nothing more, we have an exactly parallel case. The sentence token ‘There are sentence tokens’ makes itself true in exactly the

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<sup>15</sup>The exception here is Jonathan Schaffer (2010), who is a monist about truthmakers: there’s only one truthmaker (the world), so his truthmaking relation is one-many.

<sup>16</sup>Hence, there is no need to posit any sort of truthmaking universal, for relational universals are posited only to serve as ontological grounds for relations that do not already supervene upon the relata. For more on truthmaking as an internal relation, see sections 1.2.5 and 2.1 below. See David 2005 for worries about Armstrong’s claiming the “ontological free lunch” for his truthmaking relation.

same way that Socrates makes true ‘There are humans’. So I see no non-*ad hoc* way of denying that there are reflexive cases of truthmaking. It is quite easy to come up with examples.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.2.2. Standard accounts of the relation

Having seen some of the properties traditionally attributed to the truthmaking relation, we can now turn to some of the going accounts in the literature of the nature of the relation.<sup>18</sup> Here the literature offers a variety of answers. One answer is that the truthmaking relation simply is primitive (e.g., Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005). Hence:

(**TM<sub>1</sub>**) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $y$  is true in virtue of the existence of  $x$ .

**TM<sub>1</sub>** is the sort of principle that everyone in the literature accepts. What is controversial about the primitivist view is taking its ‘in virtue of’ not to admit of any further analysis.

Rodriguez-Pereyra accepts that **TM<sub>1</sub>** is as basic as it gets, and then offers paradigm examples

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<sup>17</sup>As far as I know, Marian David is the only other writer who has noticed such cases (2009: 153). E. J. Lowe holds that logically necessary truths are self-truthmakers (2007: 250). In correspondence, Schaffer has replied to me saying that the way to understand such cases is that the *truth* of these truth-bearers depends upon their *existence*. But here we have separate things, and so no case of reflexive truthmaking. My worry is that Schaffer sees three distinct things where I see only one. We have the proposition <There are propositions>, its truth (the state of affairs of its being true), and its existence (the state of affairs of its existing). Schaffer holds that the second thing is dependent upon the third thing. Because I do not recognize truth and existence as universals (in any sense such that they could be constituents of states of affairs), I only see the proposition itself. So the only thing that could stand in the truthmaking relation is the proposition. The proposition makes itself true. For similar reasons, I am not troubled by Schaffer’s objection that those who believe in necessitation are plagued by trivial truthmakers like the state of affairs of <There are penguins>’s being true being a truthmaker for <There are penguins> rather than just penguins (2008a: 312). There are no such states of affairs, since truth is not a universal (as I argue at length in section 3.3).

<sup>18</sup>Let me flag yet another assumption on my part. We’re now about to discuss what *the* truthmaking relation is, and I take it that there is only one under discussion. (For now, at least. I complicate matters myself in chapter 5.) But muddying the waters here is Matthew McGrath, who distinguishes two kinds of truthmaking, one performed by propositions, and one by worldly entities (2003). (Apparently propositions are not worldly entities?) As far as I can tell, only McGrath acknowledges his former notion of truthmaking: “If a proposition is true, then something *about* the world makes it true” (2003: 683). Here, we have propositions making themselves true. McGrath thinks his notion here *is* the intuitive notion of truthmaking (its existential counterpart, that something *in* the world makes statements true, is not), though I doubt anyone else would agree. We shall encounter McGrath’s view again in section 2.2.

by way of elucidation: *That Socrates exists* is made true by Socrates. Conjunctions are made true by whatever makes their conjuncts true. A disjunction is made true by whatever makes one of its disjuncts true.

It is important to remember that in taking something as primitive, one is not consigning it to the realm of mystery.<sup>19</sup> Nor is one not owning up to one's theoretical responsibilities. Following Lewis, we may distinguish between offering an *account* of something and offering an *analysis* of it. Lewis writes:

Not every account is an analysis! A system that takes certain Moorean facts as primitive, as unanalysed, cannot be accused of failing to make a place for them. It neither shirks the compulsory question nor answers it by denial. It does give an account. (1983: 352)

Lewis is here speaking of accounting for facts, but we can extend his idea to concepts, notions, or what have you. Every theory has its primitives. Having a store of such primitives is not in and of itself open to the charge of philosophical cheating; rather, the set of primitives a theory posits is just one more consideration to be weighed when it comes to decisions of theory choice. (Presumably, the fewer primitives the better, *ceteris paribus*.)<sup>20</sup> We might disagree as to what are the kinds of things that we should allow as primitives; but taking something as primitive in and of itself is not objectionable.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Paul Horwich (1990: 10) takes this line with respect to primitivism about truth. For criticism see Merricks 2007: 185-187.

<sup>20</sup>See also Goodman 1954: 37.

<sup>21</sup>Let me also flag the distinction between two senses of being primitive: theoretical and metaphysical. Some notion might be primitive relative to a theory. Consider all those philosophers who employ the notion of a fact, but have nothing to say about what facts are. Relative to their theories, facts are (theoretically) primitive. Such theorists help themselves to the notion, do not offer an analysis, but remain neutral on the question whether such an analysis could be given by those who care about such matters. A metaphysical primitive, by contrast, would be something that is taken to be metaphysical bedrock, and that cannot be further analyzed. Such things have also gone under the name 'brute'. The primitivism about truthmaking that I denote by '**TM<sub>I</sub>**' is of the metaphysical sort.

Not only is taking something as primitive philosophically legitimate, it is to be expected. Here we may turn to Donald Davidson:

however feeble or faulty our attempts to relate these various basic concepts to each other, these attempts fare better, and teach us more, than our efforts to produce correct and revealing definitions of basic concepts in terms of clearer or even more fundamental concepts.

This is, after all, what we should expect. For the most part, the concepts philosophers single out for attention, like truth, knowledge, belief, action, cause, the good and the right, are the most elementary concepts we have, concepts without which (I am inclined to say) we would have no concepts at all. Why then should we expect to be able to reduce these concepts definitionally to other concepts that are simpler, clearer, and more basic? We should accept the fact that what makes these concepts so important must also foreclose on the possibility of finding a foundation for them which reaches deeper into bedrock. (1996: 264)

Davidson's point is that we should expect some of our most basic philosophical concepts not to admit of any further analysis. They are so important because they are primitive: they are the foundation into which other derivative notions are to be analyzed. Now, whether the truthmaking relation is one such primitive is of course quite contentious. Its plausibility will depend on the success or failure of other analytical attempts, to which we may now turn.

We owe much of truthmaking's current appeal to Armstrong. Armstrong understands truthmakers as things that *necessitate* truths:

(**TM**<sub>2</sub>) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true.<sup>22</sup>

Necessitation here is not propositional entailment. Entailment holds between truth-bearers.

Armstrong's truthmaking relation obtains between a worldly entity on the one hand, and a

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<sup>22</sup>Armstrong no longer takes the right hand side of **TM**<sub>2</sub> to state a necessary and sufficient condition for truthmaking, just a necessary one. He, like many others, is worried about trivial truthmakers for necessary truths. It is implicit in his earlier writings and argumentation that it is necessary and sufficient (1997: 115, 2000: 150). But in later writings he distances himself from thinking that it states a sufficient condition (2004). Since Armstrong doesn't say what else truthmaking would require, it may be plausible to attribute to him the primitivism of **TM**<sub>1</sub>.

truth-bearer on the other. The necessitation relation is thus “cross-categorical”.<sup>23</sup> As an example, take some basic contingent predicative truth, *that a is F*. Armstrong rightly observes that the existence of the particular *a* and the universal *F* is not sufficient to guarantee that it is true that *a* is *F*. There are worlds where *a* is not *F*, but something else is. Supposing universals to be immanent, they exist in all and only worlds where they are instantiated (see Armstrong 1989b). Here we have a world with both *a* and *F*, but yet it is false that *a* is *F*. So Armstrong employs states of affairs, such as *a*’s being *F*. For Armstrong, a state of affairs is a complex entity composed non-mereologically of particulars and universals (see his 1997, and Vallicella 2000 for discussion). In every world where the state of affairs of *a*’s being *F* exists, it is true that *a* is *F*. Hence the state of affairs is a truthmaker for the truth that *a* is *F*. Here we have a classic example of how truthmaking considerations play a role in metaphysical theorizing. Armstrong argues for the existence of states of affairs in part by arguing that we need them in our ontology to serve as truthmakers for contingent predicative truths (among many others).

Lewis (2001b, 2003) agrees with Armstrong that truthmakers necessitate their truths. However, Lewis brings a vastly different metaphysics to the table than does Armstrong, a metaphysics that gives him a very different understanding of what it is for something to exist in other possible worlds. Strictly speaking, Lewis thinks that individuals do not exist in multiple possible worlds. Because of his modal realism, Lewis thinks that individuals can exist in only one possible world (1986). When we speak of something existing in other possible worlds, we are actually speaking of its *counterparts*. So for *x* to be a truthmaker for *y*, in every world in which *x* or one of its counterparts exist, *y* must be true. Lewis (2003)

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<sup>23</sup>Usually. Consider again cases like the proposition that there are propositions. Here we have a proposition standing on both sides of the truthmaking relation. Cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006b: 189.

does not think that there is one single counterpart relation. Rather, there are different counterpart relations serving different purposes. Suppose I drive a green Geo Metro named ‘Rudiger’. Rudiger exists only in our world, but has counterparts in other possible worlds. We can also speak of Rudiger *qua* green. Rudiger *qua* green just is Rudiger, but understood from a slightly different modal perspective. Namely, when we think of Rudiger *qua* green, we are thinking of Rudiger with greenness essential to it. They are the same object; it’s just that, in Lewis’s words, they differ “in essence” (2003: 30). Consequently, Rudiger *qua* green has a different set of counterparts than does Rudiger. Rudiger has some blue counterparts; Rudiger *qua* green has no blue counterparts. Lewis uses the notion of an object *qua* property in order to offer nominalist friendly truthmakers for predicative truths. In every world in which a counterpart of Rudiger *qua* green exists, it is true that Rudiger is green, for Rudiger *qua* green has only green counterparts. As a result, Lewis can find truthmakers for predicative truths without turning to Armstrong’s ontology of states of affairs.

The dialectic between Armstrong and Lewis shows that while they may agree on what the truthmaking relation is, and thus on what it is to be a truthmaker, they may still disagree about what truthmakers there are. It is not just Lewis that sides with Armstrong in thinking that truthmaking is necessitation. Merricks refers to truthmaking necessitation—at least as a necessary condition on truthmaking—as “truthmaker orthodoxy” (2007: 5; Cameron 2008d, Schaffer 2008b: 10, and Goff 2010 concur). Nonetheless, the view has come under attack as being both unnecessary and insufficient for truthmaking.

Mellor (2003) agrees that truthmakers serve as the ontological ground for their respective truths. However, he does not think that necessitation is necessary for

truthmaking.<sup>24</sup> To illustrate, suppose that there are exactly two chairs, A and B, in the Oval Office. Both chairs are blue. In that case, it is true that all the chairs in the Oval Office are blue. Pretend for the moment that in such a world there exist four states of affairs: A's being blue, B's being blue, A's being in the Oval Office, and B's being in the Oval Office. Armstrong would note, correctly, that the four states of affairs do not necessitate the truth of *that all the chairs in the Oval Office are blue*. There are some worlds in which both blue chairs exist, are located in the Oval Office, and yet it is false that all chairs in the Oval Office are blue. (Some worlds have a third, red chair.) Hence Armstrong would say that the four states of affairs are not a sufficient truthmaker for *that all the chairs in the Oval Office are blue*. Mellor, by contrast, says that the four states of affairs are a truthmaker for *that all the chairs in the Oval Office are blue* in spite of not necessitating it. Those four states of affairs are the ontological ground for our truth; the truth is true in virtue of those states of affairs, and nothing more. Like all general truths, its truthmaker need not necessitate it.<sup>25</sup> We shall consider this view again below.

More commonly, it is the sufficiency of the necessitation relation that is called into question (e.g., Restall 1996, Smith 1999, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002, Lowe 2007, and Merricks 2007). Consider the familiar example of necessary truths. Every object necessitates every necessary truth. In every world in which I exist, two and two are four, and squares have four sides. Hence I am a truthmaker, according to **TM<sub>2</sub>**, for *that two and two are four* and *that squares have four sides*. Lewis happily embraces the result (2001: 604). Greg Restall uses the examples to motivate a non-classical notion of necessitation and entailment, thereby

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<sup>24</sup>Mellor no longer seems to endorse this view. See his 2009.

<sup>25</sup>See also Pendlebury 1986 for a similar view, and Cox 1997 for criticism. Josh Parsons (1999), John Heil (2000), Cameron (in his 2005), and Schaffer (2010) also advocate truthmaking in the absence of necessitation. Pendlebury 2010 offers a "weakened" form of necessitarianism.

preserving the idea that truthmaking is necessitation, but offering a competing notion of necessitation (1996; see also Read 2000 and Heathcote 2003). Armstrong himself is troubled by the issue, and hopes that something along the line of Restall's suggestion is tenable.<sup>26</sup> Merricks goes in a different direction, and takes necessary truths to be counterexamples to **TM**<sub>2</sub>: “a ‘trivial truthmaker’ is not really a truthmaker at all” (2007: 24). It is not the case that two and two are four in virtue of my happening to exist, so I am not a truthmaker for *that two and two are four*. Plenty of authors agree (e.g., Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006c). Necessitation, therefore, is not sufficient for truthmaking. For Merricks, truthmakers must also be *about* the truths that they make true. Hence:

(**TM**<sub>3</sub>) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $y$  is about  $x$ , and it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true.<sup>27</sup>

*That two and two are four* is not in any plausible sense about me, and so I cannot be its truthmaker. *That a human exists* is about me, however, so I can be a truthmaker for it (assuming that I am human in every world where I exist). Of course, *that a human exists* isn't about me in particular, but neither am I a unique truthmaker for it. As for his aboutness relation, Merricks does not say much—he offers only examples of paradigm cases in order to help elucidate what he has in mind.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than supplementing the necessitation account with some further condition, some philosophers have abandoned altogether the necessitation approach to truthmaking.

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<sup>26</sup>See Armstrong 2000: 150, 2003: 14, and 2004: 11.

<sup>27</sup>See also Smith 1999: 279 and Künne 2003: 158. Cf. Lewis 2003: 25.

<sup>28</sup>Other putative counterexamples to necessitation include my being a truthmaker for the claim that my parents exist. Assuming necessity of origins, in every possible world with me, they had to have existed, too. I understand the appeal of such cases, but do not find them fully convincing. If my parents and I are so wrapped together metaphysically via the necessity of origins, then it is not so far-fetched that I could offer them something in the neighborhood of an ontological ground. Or consider this example, due to Katie Elliott: Suppose God and the Devil both exist, and are necessary beings. According to **TM**<sub>2</sub>, God is a truthmaker for ‘The Devil exists’ and the Devil is a truthmaker for ‘God exists’. But that gets matters exactly backwards. See Smith 1999 for more cases of “malignant necessitators”.

One major figure here is E. J. Lowe (2007, 2009), who adopts an “essential dependence” account of truthmaking:

(**TM<sub>4</sub>**) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $y$  is essentially such that it is true if  $x$  exists.

Here, something’s essence is understood as that in virtue of which a thing is what it is. In particular, **TM<sub>4</sub>** is concerned with the essential properties of truth-bearers. What makes a truth-bearer the truth-bearer that it is is its meaning.<sup>29</sup> Although the sentence type ‘Electrons exist’ may not mean the same thing in every possible world, the interpreted sentence token ‘Electrons exist’ does. So the interpreted sentence token ‘Electrons exist’ is such that it’s true if electrons exist (even though the sentence type ‘Electrons exist’ is not so related to electrons—but note that it’s not clear that sentence types are bearers of truth anyway). **TM<sub>4</sub>** also avoids the classic cases of malignant necessitation. That seven and five are twelve is in no way essentially related to me, so I do not make it true. But the truth that Rudiger is green is such that it is true given the existence of the state of affairs of Rudiger’s being green, or perhaps given the existence of the greenness trope belonging to Rudiger.

Nearby in conceptual real estate is Jonathan Schaffer’s (2010) view of truthmaking being a species of grounding:

(**TM<sub>5</sub>**) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $x$  grounds the truth of  $y$ .<sup>30</sup>

Here is Schaffer’s helpful account of the relation:

Finally, as to the truthmaking relation, I here impose some heavyweight metaphysical assumptions. To begin with, I work within a neo-Aristotelian framework, which posits *substances* and *posteriors* related by *ontological dependence*. The substances are the ground of being. In other terms, they are fundamental, independent, brute, irreducible, sparse, and primary. The posteriors are what need grounds. They are derivative, dependent, explicable, reducible, abundant, and secondary. What is

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Merricks: “each proposition *essentially* represents whatever it actually represents” (2008: 343).

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Kit Fine 2001.

posterior is grounded in (derivative from, dependent on, because of, based in) the substances. I shall not offer analyses of these correlative notions. But I trust that they will at least be familiar.

Perhaps the most natural explication of truthmaking within this neo-Aristotelian framework is that *truth is grounded in the substances*. Truth is *dependent*. Truth is not a basic constituent of reality, and like all dependent abstractions, truth must be *made* from the fundament. Thus I assume that the truthmaking relation is to be identified with certain instances of the dependence relation, namely, those which relate substance to truth [...]. (2010: 309-310)

Schaffer's account is also capable of avoiding the traditional counterexamples to necessitation. Its diagnosis of what goes wrong in those cases is that the malignant necessitators are not the proper metaphysical grounds for necessary truths. The truth of *that seven plus five is twelve* is in no way grounded by me. Unlike **TM<sub>1</sub>**, which takes the truthmaking relation to be primitive, **TM<sub>5</sub>** takes truthmaking to be an instance of the broader notion of grounding, which itself may well be a metaphysically basic notion. In any event, all divergences from the simple necessitation account seem to derive from a common impulse: a simple modal notion such as necessitation is inadequate to do the serious work of truthmaking. It's too cheap as it is, and thus leads to more truthmaking than there actually is. Close as it may come, necessitation does not fully capture the notions of dependence, grounding, and being true in virtue of with which truthmaker theory begins.

### 1.2.3. Truthmaking and the analytic/synthetic distinction

The standard accounts of the truthmaking relation that we have now canvassed are formulated with an eye toward solving the problem of malignant necessitators. In the remainder of section 1.2, I raise and resolve a different worry. The worry is that accounts like **TM<sub>1</sub>** through **TM<sub>5</sub>** hold as a consequence that analytic truths have truthmakers. But reflection on the nature of truthmaking and analyticity reveals that analytic truths are not true

in virtue of the existence of objects, and so any account that suggests otherwise is mistaken. Hence, I argue for an account of the truthmaking relation that explicitly forbids analytic truths from entering into it.

Not much has been written on the subject of truthmakers for analytic truths.<sup>31</sup> But a common observation to make about analytic truths is that they are true solely in virtue of their meaning, while synthetic truths are true in virtue of that and something more. Indeed, that suggestion is the first candidate that Quine (1951) considers (and dismisses) for drawing the analytic/synthetic distinction. The appearance of the phrase ‘in virtue of’ should catch the eye of anyone interested in truthmaker theory. Truthmakers are the objects in virtue of which truths are true. A natural thought, then, is that analytic truths are made true by their meanings.<sup>32</sup> Let us take the following as our example of an analytic truth:

**(R)** All red things are colored.

It is no uncontroversial matter saying what meanings are.<sup>33</sup> To give us something to work with, suppose that the meaning of **R** is given by the concepts that constitute it.<sup>34</sup> We could then say, which seems plausible, that **R** is true in virtue of the concepts RED and COLOR. Our concept COLOR is contained inside our concept RED, such that one cannot think that something is red without thereby thinking of it as being colored, and so **R** is true.<sup>35</sup>

To evaluate the claim that **R** is made true by RED and COLOR, we must return to the basic insights that drive truthmaker theory. Truthmakers are objects that provide the requisite

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<sup>31</sup>For what little there is, see Armstrong 2004: 109-111, Simons 2007b, Hofmann and Horvath 2008, and Schulte Forthcoming: 16-17. For skepticism about any sort of “metaphysical analyticity” see Boghossian 1996.

<sup>32</sup>This is the view that Armstrong recommends (2004: 109-110).

<sup>33</sup>Armstrong (2004: 109) hopes for a naturalistic account, as do Peter Simons (2007b: 69) and I.

<sup>34</sup>It is no uncontroversial matter what concepts are, either. I shall be assuming that they are contingent psychological entities, dependent for their existence on the mental activities of concept users.

<sup>35</sup>The idea of conceptual containment is, of course, due to Kant (1998: 130; A6/B10-A7/B11).

ontological grounds for truths. If **R** is made true by its constitutive concepts, then **R** is ontologically grounded by RED and COLOR, such that its truth depends upon the existence of those concepts. But while it may seem correct to say that **R** is true in virtue of the two concepts, I do not think that it is true because the two concepts provide for it any ontological ground. **R** does not owe its truth to the *existence* of the two concepts. To see why, consider a possible world in which the concepts do not exist, such as a world with no concept users. It is true of such a world that red things are colored. After all, it is true of *every* world that red things are colored. **R** is true regardless of whether anyone has the concepts it employs. Now, the fact that **R** is true of worlds where its putative actual world truthmakers do not exist does not show that its putative truthmakers are not its truthmakers in the actual world. I make it true that there are humans, even though there are worlds without me where it remains true. Still, humans are the kind of thing that make it true that there are humans. That claim is true of all and only those worlds where humans exist. If concepts are what make analytic truths true, then, by parity of reasoning, they should be true of all and only those worlds where the relevant concepts exist. But that is false. Concepts are contingent existences; analyticities are necessary truths. If analytic truths are true in virtue of the *existence* of their constitutive concepts, then we lose the ability to account for what would have made analyticities true had the world been without any concepts.<sup>36</sup> Our concepts cannot make them true in such

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<sup>36</sup>One might, in response, conclude that concepts are, after all, not psychologically contingent entities, but rather Platonic or ersatz objects. If so, then they might exist necessarily, and so will be around to serve as truthmakers for analyticities. Perhaps there are such things, but notice that to think that analytic truths are grounded in such entities is to think that analytic truths are deeply ontologically loaded (as Platonists think of mathematical truths). This is not an appealing view of what are supposed to be the most ontologically innocuous of claims. But for those who do take on views of concepts that are Fregean (1951), or otherwise take concepts to be necessary beings, they need not automatically conclude that analyticities are *made true* by them, in the sense that their truth depends upon the *existence* of such concepts. The suggestion, explored below, is that concepts may help to explain the truth of analyticities despite not making them true. If they do take their necessarily existing concepts to be truthmakers for analyticities, they will run into a paradox. (See footnote 63 of this chapter.)

possibilities, for *ex hypothesi* they do not exist in such scenarios. For something to be a truthmaker, it must at the least exist.

The right conclusion to draw is that analytic truths are not true in virtue of the *existence* of the concepts that give them their meaning. May we still maintain that analytic truths are true in virtue of the concepts that give them meaning? I believe that we can. To do so, we need to recognize that the ‘in virtue of’ phraseology need not indicate only one relation. Truthmaker theorists reject the idea that truth can be a fundamental constituent of reality. Truths require grounds; their truth is owed to something in the world. The truth that there are penguins, for example, owes its truth to the various penguins populating the planet. Focusing on cases like this, we see that truths often require *ontological* grounds. Certain things have to exist in order for certain truths to be true. But not all truths require ontological grounds; ontological positing is not the only means of avoiding brute truths.

Suppose, then, that there are two distinct kinds of truths. For both kinds, their truth is not taken to be fundamental, but rather to be derivative. One kind includes truths like the truth that there are penguins that are true in virtue of the world containing certain kinds of things. The second kind of truths are ontologically vacuous; their truth is not dependent upon the existence or non-existence of anything. Hence, they are necessarily true, true regardless of how the world is. Still, their truth is not a brute, fundamental feature of reality; they owe their truth not to the existence of the citizens of the world, but to (something in the neighborhood of) the meanings of words. ‘All red things are colored’ is true in virtue of the concepts RED and COLOR. The sentence is not true in virtue of the *existence* of the concepts, but in some other way.

Here, now, is the proposal. Truthmaker theory is a metaphysical enterprise that gives an ontological accounting of the truths that we accept. The search for ontological grounds—the search for truthmakers—is a helpful way of understanding ontological investigation. But we should not automatically conclude that all truths require ontological ground. Armstrong often recounts how he and Charlie Martin were persuaded that what was wrong with phenomenalism and behaviorism was that they appealed to counterfactual truths without offering any ontological grounds for them (e.g., 2004: 1-3). Perhaps, though, ontological grounds are not the only kind of grounding that truths may have. An ontologically ungrounded counterfactual is one thing; an ontologically ungrounded analyticity may well be quite another. My view is that truthmaking ambitions are misplaced when applied to analytic truths. Analytic truths are ontologically empty; their truth does not depend upon the existence of anything whatsoever. Their truth still needs to be accounted for; it's just that their truth admits of a distinctly *non-ontological accounting*. Synthetic truths, by contrast, are true in virtue of the way the world; their truth must admit of a distinctly *ontological accounting*.<sup>37</sup>

On the present suggestion, there are two senses of ‘being true in virtue of’, each attaching to one side of the analytic/synthetic divide. Only one involves a kind of ontological dependence. That notion is the one central to traditional truthmaker theory. Analytic truths are also true in virtue of something, but here we are not employing a relation that involves ontological dependence; instead, what seems to be involved is some sort of conceptual dependence. Thus, even if analyticities are true in virtue of their constitutive concepts, they are not *made true* by them, in the way those words are usually meant. Unfortunately, giving a full analysis of analyticity in terms of this suggestion of conceptual dependence is beyond the

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<sup>37</sup>The view originally considered by Armstrong in his first explicit explorations of truthmaking was that all contingent truths have truthmakers (1969: 23, 1989a, 1989b: 88). Rodriguez-Pereyra prefers to restrict truthmaking to “an important class of synthetic true propositions”, but doesn’t say why (2005: 18).

scope of this project.<sup>38</sup> What is crucial for our project—giving an account of the *truthmaking* relation and the truths that stand in it—is to see that analytic truths are not *made true* in this ontological sense, and so must be restricted from the truthmaking relation.

#### 1.2.4. Troubles for truthmaking

If the foregoing is on the right track, it is mistaken to look for truthmakers for analytic truths. Hence, any account of the truthmaking relation that holds as a consequence that analyticities do have truthmakers must be mistaken. As I shall now argue, all of the going accounts of the truthmaking relation in the literature have precisely this consequence, and so we need a different account of what the relation is that holds between a truth and its truthmaker.

Let us begin with **TM<sub>2</sub>**, the bare necessitation account of truthmaking. As we saw above, many have argued that necessitation is insufficient for truthmaking because it leads to trivial truthmakers for necessary truths. According to **TM<sub>2</sub>**, every object is a truthmaker for every necessary truth. Since analytic truths are necessary truths, **TM<sub>2</sub>** holds that analyticities are made true many times over. If analytic truths do not have truthmakers, then truthmaking cannot be necessitation.

It might be more. Hence, Merricks (2007) adopts **TM<sub>3</sub>** and its additional aboutness constraint, thereby avoiding the problem of trivial truthmakers for necessities. But **TM<sub>3</sub>** fares no better than its predecessor at handling analyticities. Consider, for example:

(S) All sentences are sentences.

**S** is an analytic truth. It is also a necessary truth, and so is a self-necessitator: it's impossible for **S** to exist and not be true.<sup>39</sup> But **S** is also about itself; **S** is about all sentences, **S** included.

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<sup>38</sup>See Russell 2008 for a recent ambitious attempt to give an account of analyticity.

Hence, **S** is about itself and necessitates itself, and so, according to **TM**<sub>3</sub>, makes itself true. But **S** has no truthmaker, since it is analytic. **TM**<sub>3</sub> is false.

Turn now to Lowe's essential dependence account of truthmaking (2007). When it comes to (interpreted) sentences, it is their meaning that makes them the sentences they are, that constitutes their essence. The problem for **TM**<sub>4</sub> is that it holds that all analytic truths make themselves true. It is of the essence of analytic truths that they are true regardless of what exists; **S**, being the sentence that it is, is such that, if it exists, it is guaranteed to be true. Analytic truths need nothing else around in order to be true; it is their very vacuity that makes them analytic. So while I might not make **S** true, since I do not figure into its essence, **S** does figure into its own essence, such that, according to **TM**<sub>4</sub>, it makes itself true. But that cannot be, for **S** has no truthmaker.

Next consider Jonathan Schaffer's (2010) view of truthmaking as grounding. Schaffer takes grounding to be a primitive notion, but does hold that it is a hyperintensional relation that holds between substances and truth. Since grounding is taken as a primitive, it's hard to evaluate definitively whether analyticities provide their own grounds. But we have just established that an analyticity's essence guarantees its truth. Simply in virtue of being **S**, for example, **S** is true. Further, there doesn't seem to be anything else that grounds the truth of **S**. As a necessary truth, **S** would still have been true even if all contingent existences had never existed. So **S** looks to be grounded either in itself (or perhaps its meaning, however construed). But that cannot be, since **S** has no truthmaker, and so by **TM**<sub>5</sub> has no grounds. Finally we come to the view that the truthmaking relation is primitive (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005). Rodriguez-Pereyra adopts primitivism because, like Merricks, he thinks that

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<sup>39</sup>Here I am taking **S** to be not just a sentence token, but an *interpreted* sentence token. After all, **S** is an example of a truth, and sentences are plausibly truth-valued only after they are paired with an interpretation.

truthmaking is stronger than necessitation. So Rodriguez-Pereyra might be thinking of truthmaking exactly along the lines that Merricks does. If so, then it offers no escape from our current problem. If he understands it differently, then we need a principled account of how it turns out that analyticities are not made true. To give that sort of account, as we shall below, we need to reject primitivism and offer in its place an acceptable analysis of the truthmaking relation that avoids the problems facing **TM**<sub>2</sub> through **TM**<sub>5</sub>.

#### 1.2.5. Settling for the synthetic

In the previous section I argued that the standard accounts of the truthmaking relation allow for analyticities to have truthmakers. (In many cases, they tend to make themselves true.) But analyticities are not made true at all; what we need is an account of the truthmaking relation that reflects this fact. Truthmaking, at its core, involves a kind of ontological dependence. When  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$ , that is because  $y$  depends for its truth in some sense on the existence of  $x$ . But analyticities require no ontological accounting, for they do not depend upon the world for their truth. They are ontologically vacuous in the sense that their truth is not bound up with what does and does not exist. Their truth still needs to be accounted for—lest we have to take them as brute—but not ontologically. Their truth must be explained some other way.

The suggestion we explored above is that analyticities are true in virtue of their constituent concepts, where the ‘in virtue of’ involves a kind of conceptual dependence, and not the sort of ontological dependence that holds, for example, between me and the truth that I exist. Our present task is to offer an account of the truthmaking relation that incorporates the best of the existing accounts, but also takes to heart the above considerations involving

analyticities. On my account, the truthmaking relation—and so our answer to question 1 above—is given by the following:

(**TM**) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $y$  is purely synthetic,  $y$  depends upon the existence of  $x$  for its truth, and it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true.

The first requirement—that truths that are made true be purely synthetic—is due to our previous discussion that suggests that the foundational ideas underlying truthmaking (ontological grounding and dependence) are misplaced when it comes to analytic truths. I appeal to *purely* synthetic truths in order to explain potentially problematic cases that involve truth-functional compounds whose truth depends on analytic atoms.<sup>40</sup> Consider the distinction between

(**O<sub>C</sub>**) Obama exists, and all red things are colored

and

(**O<sub>D</sub>**) Obama exists, or all red things are colored.

**O<sub>C</sub>** and **O<sub>D</sub>** are both synthetic, but only the latter is purely synthetic. Impurely synthetic truths are truth-functional compounds whose truth depends upon the truth-values of their constitutive analyticities. **O<sub>C</sub>** is impurely synthetic because its truth depends upon the truth of its analytic second conjunct. **O<sub>C</sub>** is not true in virtue of the existence of anything, which is to say that there is no object upon which its (entire) truth depends. To be sure, the truth of its first conjunct depends upon the existence of Obama, but its second conjunct is not made true by anything. Since analyticities are *truthmaker gaps*—that is, truths without truthmakers—

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<sup>40</sup>Peter Schulte, coming from a different direction, independently lands on the idea (and language) of truthmaking applying only to purely synthetic truths (Forthcoming: 16-17). The problem cases I have in mind are cousins of the potentially paradoxical sentences we shall meet in section 1.2.6, sentences like ‘Obama exists, and this (entire) sentence has no truthmaker’. If this sentence has a truthmaker, then it’s true and therefore doesn’t have a truthmaker. That’s impossible, so it doesn’t have a truthmaker, and so, since Obama exists, it’s true. But Obama would count as a truthmaker for it by the lights of **TM** if not for the restriction to the purely synthetic. Thanks go to Rachael Briggs for pointing out such cases to me.

they spread their “gappiness” into anything built upon them.<sup>41</sup> Hence, in order for a truth to have a truthmaker, it must include as a truth-functional part no analyticity upon whose truth (or falsity) it depends.<sup>42</sup> Such is the case with  $\mathbf{O}_D$ . We can allow that  $\mathbf{O}_D$  has a truthmaker, because the truth of  $\mathbf{O}_D$  does not depend upon the truth of its analytic disjunct. On the one hand,  $\mathbf{O}_D$  is true in virtue of the existence of Obama (by way of considering its first disjunct). On the other hand,  $\mathbf{O}_D$  is true in virtue of RED and COLOR (by way of considering its second disjunct). All we have here is the familiar fact that disjunctions can be true in various ways.<sup>43</sup>

**TM** also includes the condition that where  $x$  makes true  $y$ ,  $y$ 's truth depends upon the existence of  $x$ . The notion of dependence is in place in order to satisfy the need for some sort of hyperintensional relation that will exclude the familiar cases of trivial truthmaking. Before, we saw how the other accounts deal with the task of supplementing (or replacing) the intensional notion of necessitation that cannot discriminate between necessary truths.<sup>44</sup> In a sense, the three notions—aboutness, essential dependence, and grounding—may well come to the same thing since they are all attempts to get at whatever it is that ensures that truthmaking obtains between the truth that there are even prime numbers and 2 rather than

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<sup>41</sup>There is an obvious parallel here with Kleene's strong tables (Kleene 1938), according to which disjunction between a truth and a truth-value gap is true, and a conjunction between a truth and a truth-value gap is a truth-value gap. Thanks to Keith Simmons for pointing this out.

<sup>42</sup>In his Hempel lectures, Stephen Yablo offers a theory of logical parthood (2008). According to it, the analytic atom here is a part of the conjunction, but not the disjunction, for it is entailed by the former but not the latter. The thought that the analytic conjunct is a logical part of  $\mathbf{O}_C$  but not  $\mathbf{O}_D$  supports and helps to explain my present suggestion that the conjunct's analyticity “infects” only the former. My thanks to an anonymous referee for a related article for this suggestion.

<sup>43</sup>Some might draw the moral here that truthmaking should be restricted to synthetic atomic truths (cf. Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984 and Mellor 2009). I appreciate the sentiment, but what, for example, of modal claims and counterfactuals? Many truths do not sit well inside first-order logic, but still call for truthmaker investigation. Cf. Pendlebury 2010: 140-141.

<sup>44</sup>Note that the difficulty here for truthmaker theorists is similar to the difficulties faced by theorists in other areas of philosophy. For example, there are those who want to give possible worlds accounts of propositions and truth-conditions (Lewis 1970 and 1986), and those who want to avoid the paradoxes of implication by adopting a relevance logic. See Restall 1996, Read 2000, and Heathcote 2003 for discussion of the connections between this last topic and truthmaking.

me.<sup>45</sup> We can *call* that notion whatever we like; if one account really is better than another, that must be because one of them produces better results, or admits of a more illuminating account.<sup>46</sup>

Are there any cases where grounding, aboutness, and essential dependence come apart? It is hard to say, especially since those notions are sufficiently vague such that any disagreement about their consequences might well be reformulated as disagreements about the notion itself. For example, Merricks thinks that negative existentials like ‘There are no unicorns’ aren’t about anything at all, and so have no truthmakers. Armstrong, presumably, would say that negative existentials are about something—totalities—for negative existentials are just the flip side of universal generalizations, which make claims about everything all at once. Or consider again ‘There are humans’. That sentence is essentially such that it is true if I exist. I also seem to ground its truth. But is it about me? In the most natural sense of ‘about’, it’s clearly not; only a complete narcissist could think he was so special. So is this a case where Merricks’s account differs from the others? Presumably not, since Merricks holds that ‘There are humans’ does satisfy the aboutness condition for me, even though it’s not about me in particular (2007: 30). My suspicion is that if we attempt to elucidate further the notions of grounding, aboutness, or essential dependence, they will turn out to amount to the same thing. After all, such elucidations will be driven by appeals to the same set of particular cases where it seems clear whether or not truthmaking obtains. (The

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<sup>45</sup>Cf. Merricks 2008: 335-336.

<sup>46</sup>Schaffer (2008a), for instance, argues that grounding is superior to aboutness in that it is a more familiar notion, and that aboutness seems to be a notion relevant only to sentences, and not propositions, which perhaps are the primary bearers of truth. Lowe himself gives reason to worry about **TM<sub>4</sub>**, for it holds that propositions can be essentially related to things that don’t exist (2007: 258). For example, ‘There are humans’ is essentially such that it is true if Batman exists. Thus, ‘There are humans’ is essentially related to something that doesn’t exist, namely, Batman.

parties to the various views don't disagree about the core cases.) For present purposes, let us assume that one of these notions is correct; I've chosen to call it simply 'dependence'.<sup>47</sup>

Finally we come to necessitation, which I (alongside orthodoxy) continue to maintain is a necessary condition on truthmaking. Schaffer, however, rejects necessitation as not belonging at all to the theory of truthmaking. He gives three reasons (2010: 320; see also his 2008a: 309-310). First, taking truthmaking to be necessitation, one is led to trivial truthmakers for necessary truths. But such a consideration casts doubt only on necessitation's being sufficient for truthmaking. Second, Schaffer notes that while necessitation is reflexive and non-asymmetric, truthmaking is irreflexive and asymmetric. However, this assumption is incorrect, for there are cases of reflexive (and thus symmetric) truthmaking: The proposition that there are propositions makes itself true, as does the sentence token 'There are sentence tokens' and the belief that there are beliefs.<sup>48</sup> Still, even if Schaffer is correct, his observation only shows that truthmaking and necessitation are not identical; the latter could still form part of the former. Finally, Schaffer holds that necessitation is a relation between propositions, and so not fit to give an account of the truthmaking relation, into which non-truth-bearing objects may enter. But here we have a mere terminological quarrel: we are taking necessitation to be a cross-categorical relation, something that obtains between an object and a truth-bearer. In sum, Schaffer concludes that "It is a mistake to think that talk of dependence can be swapped out for talk of any pattern of modal covariation" (2008a: 310). Perhaps, but this leads only to the limited conclusion that necessitation is not identical to truthmaking,

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<sup>47</sup>There is much more to explore, of course, on the nature of this dependence. Giving a full account is beyond the scope of the present project, but we will encounter the issue again when we turn to the topic of the compatibility of truthmaker theory and deflationism about truth (in section 3.2.3).

<sup>48</sup>See footnote 17 above.

which we are already happy to grant. So I do not take Schaffer to have motivated a rejection of necessitation from the business of truthmaking.

Hugh Mellor (2003), as we saw above, has offered independent reason for rejecting necessitation as necessary for truthmaking by considering general truths.<sup>49</sup> Consider the very last existing dodo, and call him ‘Dodo’. At a certain point in time,  $t$ , it was true that there was exactly one dodo, namely, Dodo. Dodo himself was not then a necessitator for the truth that there is exactly one dodo at  $t$ , for it’s possible that Dodo could have existed, but the sentence be false (because other dodos might have been around). Nonetheless, Mellor thinks, Dodo himself was a perfectly sufficient truthmaker for the claim that there is exactly one dodo at  $t$ . We have two choices. First, we can hold with Mellor that Dodo makes it true that there is exactly one dodo at  $t$ , thus rejecting necessitation as necessary for truthmaking. Or, secondly, we can hold that Dodo does not make it true, thereby preserving necessitation as a necessary condition on truthmaking. In that case, we can either take ‘There is exactly one dodo at  $t$ ’ to be a truthmaker gap (as in Bigelow 1988 and Lewis 2001), or find something else to be its truthmaker (such as a totality state of affairs, as in Armstrong 2004). The literature tends to go in the second direction (recall that necessitation is the orthodox view), and then divides over the right conclusion to draw about what if anything makes general truths true.

Alongside orthodoxy, I suggest we take the latter view. If necessitation is unnecessary for truthmaking, the following is possible: some truth  $y$  is true in virtue of the existence of some object  $x$ , even though it’s possible that  $x$  could have existed, but  $y$  be false. Looking at the expanse of possibilities, we fix in on the ones with  $x$ , and see that they are heterogeneous with respect to whether  $y$  is true. But recall that the point of searching for truthmakers is that truths must be held ontologically accountable. On Mellor’s picture of things, once we have

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<sup>49</sup>But again, Mellor no longer seems to endorse this view. See his 2009.

done our accounting—by offering a truthmaker for some truth—it does not yet follow that the truth is true. For the ontological accounting offered underdetermines the truth-value of the target truth. The books have yet to be settled. If the existence of the supposed truthmaker doesn't even guarantee that the truth is true, then in what sense have we given an ontological accounting of its truth? Its truth is not yet determined. Mellor accounts for the truth of 'There is exactly one dodo at *t*' by pointing merely at Dodo. Yet when we look at the space of possibilities, we see that there are some with Dodo where the sentence is true, and some with Dodo where the sentence is false. So it seems we haven't finished our accounting yet. The truth of the sentence depends on more than just Dodo—we have to somehow take into account the separate, further fact that Dodo is the *only* dodo.<sup>50</sup>

The opponent of necessitation must also hold that Dodo makes the sentence true in some possible worlds, but not in others. Now we can see that truthmaking on this view cannot be an internal relation—it must be something above and beyond the relata.<sup>51</sup> Armstrong argues that the truthmaking relation is *internal*, in the sense that it obtains in every possible world in which the relata both exist (2004: 9). Since the truthmaking relation is not anything above and beyond the relata, there is no need to posit any sort of truthmaking universal.<sup>52</sup> But if necessitation is unnecessary for the truthmaking relation, the relation is external. The relata can both exist, even though the one doesn't make the other true. Since Dodo and 'There is exactly one dodo at *t*' sometimes stand in the truthmaking relation, and sometimes do not, we need an account of what makes the difference, of what else it is in the

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<sup>50</sup>Cf. Molnar 2000: 84 and Armstrong 2004: 5-7. Green 2009 argues that such arguments are question-begging.

<sup>51</sup>Nor can it be, as Lowe holds, merely a matter of the essential properties of the relata themselves.

<sup>52</sup>See David 2005 for worries about Armstrong's claiming the "ontological free lunch" for his truthmaking relation.

world that makes the two stand in the relation.<sup>53</sup> So in taking truthmaking to be an external relation, we need an extra account of whatever else it is that it takes to make two things stand in the truthmaking relation. In our case, whether Dodo is a truthmaker for ‘There is exactly one dodo at *t*’ depends upon the existence or absence of other dodos at *t*. Here we have a complicated account of how the truthmaking relation works that takes on an additional explanatory burden not borne by the orthodox view. Whether two things stand in the truthmaking relation depends upon the existence of other, distinct existences. The simpler approach which I favor is to take the truthmaking relation to be an internal one, such that if it holds between a pair of relata in one possible world, it holds in every possible world with those relata. Otherwise, we are left with a seemingly unprincipled account of what the relation is. It would have to be an external relation, such that its obtaining would depend upon the existence of other things quite distinct from it.<sup>54</sup>

I conclude that we should accept necessitation as a necessary condition on truthmaking. Truthmakers are metaphysically sufficient conditions for their truths. If they weren’t, then they would not be suited for their fundamental task of giving an ontological accounting for their truths. The truthmaker itself should provide the adequate accounting. On Mellor’s view, we would need to take the truthmaker plus whatever else was required to account for the obtaining of the truthmaking relation in the particular case. On my view, that second requirement is vacuous, since truthmaking is an internal relation.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Consider how matters stand for closely related supervenience claims. Suppose some set of properties S supervenes on some set of base properties B. If it turns out that things differ in their S properties without differing in their B properties because of some further (“releasing”) properties R, then it seems that we need to rethink the original supervenience base and pack the R properties into the B properties. See Blackburn 1985.

<sup>54</sup>See also Armstrong 2005: 275.

<sup>55</sup>There is a regress worry here as well. Mellor holds that ‘Dodo is a truthmaker for ‘There is exactly one dodo at *t*’ is true. But what makes that truth true? Note that Dodo and the sentence ‘There is exactly one dodo at *t*’

I have presented **TM** as involving three separate necessary conditions, but two may well be redundant. I have given no further analysis of the relevant notion of dependence. Hopefully it is familiar. It is supposed to be the notion at work in explaining why I am not a truthmaker for necessary truths, and for why RED and COLOR are truthmakers for ‘There are concepts’ even though they are not truthmakers for ‘All red things are colored’. It may well be that the notion of dependence is such that it has syntheticity and necessitation built right into it. If so, then the statement of my account is redundant.<sup>56</sup> As stated, though, it makes clear that I take necessitation to be a consequence of the truthmaking relation, and that only purely synthetic truths may enter into it.

I have argued for restricting truthmaking to the purely synthetic; one might, however, seek to limit it further to just the contingent. The most fundamental idea underlying truthmaker theory is that what is true depends upon how the world is. But the truth of necessary truths, so goes this line of thought, does not depend upon how the world is. They would still have been true regardless of how things had turned out. So necessary truths do not even fall under the umbrella of truthmaking.<sup>57</sup> I am sympathetic to this line of argument, but it has a severe consequence: there could then be no project of giving a truthmaking account for the truth of mathematical statements (among perhaps others, such as certain ethical truths).

Schaffer claims that “there are substantive issues concerning the fundamental grounds for

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will not necessitate it, so if we hold that they are the truthmaker for it, we’ll want to know what makes ‘Dodo and ‘There is exactly one dodo at *t*’ are the truthmakers for ‘Dodo is a truthmaker for ‘There is exactly one dodo at *t*’” true.

<sup>56</sup>Note also that, for my purposes, I am taking the notion of a synthetic truth for granted, and using it to give an account of the truthmaking relation. On pain of circularity, one would then have to define the analytic/synthetic distinction without appealing back to truthmaking. For one such attempt, again see Russell 2008. If a more precise account of dependence could be offered that did not have to make explicit appeal to the analytic/synthetic distinction, then we could use *that* notion to give an account of the analytic/synthetic distinction, and thereby answer the Quinean challenge of explicating the elusive distinction.

<sup>57</sup>Simons expresses sympathy with this view (2005: 254), as does Mellor (2003: 213). See also Armstrong 1969: 23, 1989a, and 1989b: 88, and Heathcote 2006: 156, which attributes this position to Wittgenstein (1921).

mathematical truths” (2010: 320). If mathematical truths do not have truthmakers by way of their necessity, then it appears that we lose the important debate in the philosophy of mathematics over what the grounds are for mathematical truth. Restricting truthmakers just to contingent truths also spells trouble for necessary beings, be there any. If some entity E is a necessary being, then E could not be a truthmaker for ‘E exists’ because that sentence would be necessarily true, and necessary truths would not have truthmakers according to such restrictions. Now, we might hold with Hume that the very idea of a necessary being is simply conceptual confusion (an attempt to turn a matter of fact into a relation of ideas), but it would be preferable not to have to assume that from the outset. So we have some reason not to immediately divorce necessary truths from truthmaking.

Still, it might be objected that my account still loses the ability to countenance the ontological questions of interest to philosophers of mathematics. After all, many think that the truths of mathematics are analytic, and thus would not have truthmakers according to **TM**. But here we may recognize what is actually a strength of my view. There is a substantive philosophical question regarding whether the truths of mathematics are analytic or synthetic. Consider ‘There is an even prime number’. If that is analytic, then it is true in virtue of its meaning, or the containment relations between its constitutive concepts, or something of the like. If it is analytic, then it’s *not* true in virtue of some existing entity, as the mathematical Platonist would seem to have to hold.<sup>58</sup> If mathematical truths truly are analytic, then their truth is not to be accounted for by finding entities in the world that ground it. My account gives us that consequence. But if mathematical truths are synthetic, then it seems quite plausible that their truth requires a more robust grounding account—an ontological account

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<sup>58</sup>Cf. Cameron 2010, which argues that mathematical truths are trivially true, and hence require no ontological grounding.

that can be provided by truthmaker theorists. I think Schaffer overstates the point: there are substantive issues concerning the fundamental grounds for mathematical truths *if* mathematical truths are synthetic. The antecedent there is a live, substantive philosophical issue, and so my account preserves the ontological debate that exists in the philosophy of mathematics. The issue over whether mathematics requires ontological grounding nicely coincides with the issue over whether mathematical truths are analytic or synthetic. Similarly, any truth about a necessary being would seem to be a good candidate for a synthetic necessity. ‘E exists’, if necessarily true, is true in virtue of the existence of E, not in virtue of the sentence’s meaning. So again, my account gives the preferred answer. Where necessary truths are analytic, they are ontologically vacuous and need no ontological grounding. Where necessary truths are synthetic (if indeed this ever happens), they may not be ontologically vacuous, and thus we can apply truthmaker theory to them.

#### 1.2.6. Paradox avoided

One advantage of accepting **TM** and the kind of non-maximalism it entails is that it provides a satisfying, consistent account of some potentially paradoxical sentences for truthmaker theory. Such sentences were brought into the literature by Peter Milne (2005).<sup>59</sup>

Consider the sentence

- (**Y**) ‘yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation’  
yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation.

Suppose for *reductio* that **Y** has a truthmaker. Then **Y** is true. Thus, the predicate ‘yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation’ truthfully applies to

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<sup>59</sup>Milne’s example is ‘This sentence has no truthmaker’. I have gone with my example because Milne’s employs self-reference, which might compromise its status as an analyticity. A sentence that references itself may well presuppose its own existence, and so its truth might depend upon not just its meaning, but on its own existence as well.

itself. So the sentence that it yields via self-predication, which is **Y** itself, has no truthmaker. That contradicts the initial assumption, so **Y** has no truthmaker.

Now, if **Y** has no truthmaker, that seems to leave open four possibilities. It could be false, without truth-value, meaningless, or true, in which case it would be a truthmaker gap. If **Y** is false, then the self-application of the predicate yields a sentence with a truthmaker and that is therefore true; but since that sentence just is **Y**, we've landed in contradiction. So **Y** can't be false. If **Y** is without any truth-value, then it is not true. That means that the predicate, applied to itself, does not yield a sentence without a truthmaker, and so the sentence it yields, **Y**, does have a truthmaker and so is true after all.

Might **Y** just be meaningless? It's not at all obvious that it is. The predicate in question is perfectly meaningful. It can be predicated truly or falsely. The sentence

(F) 'is in French' yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation

is true, for "'is in French' is in French' is false, and thus without a truthmaker. The sentence

(E) 'is in English' yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation

is false, for "'is in English' is in English' is true, and, presumably, has a truthmaker (probably involving the sentence itself and the English language, however conceived). So the predicate itself is sound. Self-application of predicates is likewise unproblematic. Some predicates self-apply ('is a predicate'), some don't ('is green'). There is no *prima facie* reason to be suspicious of **Y**'s meaningfulness.

But suppose **Y** is, nevertheless, meaningless.<sup>60</sup> In that case, the self-predication of ‘yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation’ yields a meaningless sentence. But if it’s meaningless, then it doesn’t have a truthmaker. So if **Y** is meaningless, then ‘yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation’ yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation. And that, of course, is exactly what **Y** says. So if **Y** is meaningless, then valid reasoning leads to the conclusion that it’s true.

Taking **Y** to be false, without truth-value, or meaningless all lead to absurdity. The only consistent path is to take **Y** to be true. Now if **Y** is true, that means that the self-application of the predicate yields a sentence, **Y**, without a truthmaker. So there is one consistent treatment of **Y**: it’s a truth without a truthmaker.

Milne attempts to use sentences like **Y** to *refute* maximalism, the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker, but such application is contentious. As Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006a) argues, anyone who embraces maximalism will treat sentences like **Y** as being paradoxical, to be assimilated with the (strengthened) liar sentence:

(L) This sentence is not true.<sup>61</sup>

According to the maximalist, every truth has a truthmaker. Hence, if **Y** is true then it has a truthmaker, and so paradox arises because **Y** is true only if it has no truthmaker. In order to deal with **Y**, the maximalist must somehow contain it by setting it aside as not expressing a

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<sup>60</sup>For, someone might object, since the (strengthened) Liar sentence (‘This sentence is not true’) manages to arise from the combination of two otherwise natural notions (truth and self-reference), so too might paradox spring from **Y**’s otherwise innocent components.

<sup>61</sup>Interestingly, Milne presents ‘This sentence has no truthmaker’ by way of analogy with Gödel sentences, not the Liar (2005: 222). Presumably he wants to discourage the natural charge that the sentence is paradoxical and so ignorable.

proposition,<sup>62</sup> or being meaningless, truth-value-less, or otherwise ignorable. They also need to diagnose where the seemingly sound reasoning that leads to **Y**'s being a truthmaker gap goes wrong.

One immediate advantage for non-maximalists is that **Y** poses no paradox at all for them. Non-maximalists accept that there are truths without truthmakers, and so may happily admit **Y** among their number. **Y**'s *prima facie* meaningfulness may be preserved, as may the reasoning that reveals its truth. Now, it would be desirable to have an independent explanation of why **Y** turns out to be a truthmaker gap. We can find that explanation by recognizing that **Y** is very plausibly an analytic truth. The reasoning involved in demonstrating **Y**'s truth relies on an analytic connection between TRUTH and TRUTHMAKER: anything with a truthmaker is true. Logical reasoning alone with the concepts TRUTH and TRUTHMAKER reveals **Y** to be true. Certainly **Y** is not true in virtue of any empirical states of affairs. Analytic truths are true simply because the words that make them up mean what they do, regardless of what is going on in the world. Hence, we can recognize their truth provided we know what they say and reason soundly with them. Such is the case with **Y**: once we know what a truthmaker is, it's a simple matter of logic to see that **Y** doesn't have one. **Y** is thus best understood as a truth that is true in virtue of its meaning; because the predicate it involves means what it does, **Y** comes out as true, and necessarily so.

On the account I have offered so far, not all truths have truthmakers, including all analyticities. Hence, my account offers a consistent treatment of **Y**, and an independent

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<sup>62</sup>This is the view favored by Heathcote 2006: 160.

explanation for its truthmaker gap status. Like all analytic truths, it has no truthmaker, which is exactly the conclusion of our reasoning with it.<sup>63</sup>

Consider, now, how other approaches to truthmaker theory must handle **Y**. The maximalist cannot accept that there are truths without truthmakers, and so must find some flaw in the reasoning that reveals **Y** to be true. López de Sa and Zardini (2006 and 2007) argue that there must be some flaw in the reasoning, but do not identify what it is. When it comes to Milne’s original example (‘This sentence has no truthmaker’), they suspect that the problem involves reasoning with “factive” predicates like ‘is true’ and ‘has a truthmaker’, where a predicate “is factive iff it is a conceptual truth that a declarative sentence is true if the predicate [truly] applies to it” (2006: 155). Note, though, that ‘yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation’ is not factive—it can’t even be applied to sentences. So even if López de Sa and Zardini’s response works for Milne’s example, it doesn’t work for **Y**. Maximalists look to be held hostage to a forthcoming solution to the Liar paradox if they are to somehow resolve the new paradox from **Y**.

Any non-maximalist approach to truthmaker theory has the immediate advantage that it need not recognize **Y** as paradoxical, for it is paradoxical only on the condition that every truth has a truthmaker. So non-maximalists can avoid the paradox altogether. But **Y** does cause problems for the standard accounts of the truthmaking relation we surveyed earlier. As an analytic truth, **Y** is a self-necessitator whose essence guarantees its own truth.<sup>64</sup> But any account of the truthmaking relation that holds as a consequence that **Y** has a truthmaker is

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<sup>63</sup>Notice that the paradox would resume for those who thought that concepts made true the analyticities that are properly composed of them. (See footnote 36 of this chapter.) For then **Y** would be made true by its constitutive concepts, contrary to what we can prove about it.

<sup>64</sup>As for Merricks’s account (**TM**<sub>3</sub>), the predicate ‘yields a sentence without a truthmaker when appended to its own quotation’ would be a truthmaker for **Y**, for **Y** is about the predicate in the relevant sense, and is a (trivial) necessitator for it, since **Y** is a necessary truth.

false, since **Y**, provably, has no truthmaker. So non-maximalists who don't accept **TM** must also somehow contain it, lest it end up refuting their account of the truthmaking relation.

I offer my package of non-maximalism together with **TM** as a means of explaining what is going on with sentences like **Y**, and avoiding the paradoxes they pose for other views. While my account does not refute other views that try to block the conclusion that **Y** is a truthmaker gap, it does give a consistent account of it that does not hold its resolution hostage to a forthcoming solution to the Liar paradox, or future discovery involving what is flawed in the (seemingly perfect) reasoning that leads to the conclusion that **Y** is a truth without a truthmaker. My account takes **Y**, and the reasoning involving it, at face value.

### 1.3. The scope of truthmaking

#### 1.3.1. The doctrinal approach to truthmaking

We have now settled on an account of what the truthmaking relation is, and hence on what it is to be a truthmaker. Truthmakers are grounding necessitators of purely synthetic truths.<sup>65</sup> It is important to appreciate that I have not argued that all purely synthetic truths have truthmakers. I have only argued that *if* a truth has a truthmaker, then that truth is purely synthetic. Still, **TM** has implications for our second basic truthmaking question, the question of how wide the scope of truthmaking extends. Do all truths have truthmakers, or only some restricted class? We have already encountered the most obvious answer to the question, truthmaker maximalism, according to which all truths have truthmakers. If we proceed with **TM** as our account of truthmaking (as I think we should), full bore maximalism is off the table. But stepping back from our adoption of **TM** and its implications for the scope of

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<sup>65</sup>I use the language of 'grounds' here as the inverse of 'depends', since nothing else is available. Where A depends upon B, B grounds A. I am not thereby assuming the loaded notions of ground found in Kit Fine (2001) and Schaffer (2010).

truthmaking, let us now consider some of the answers others have offered to our second question, so as to better appreciate the landscape of the truthmaking literature.

First, it seems that no one should be an advocate of truthmaker nihilism—the view that there are no truthmakers. As we have already seen, everything is a truthmaker. Take some existing object  $x$ . It is true that  $x$  exists. Further,  $x$  is a truthmaker for *that  $x$  exists*, regardless of what one specifically thinks about the truthmaking relation.<sup>66</sup> So every existing object is a truthmaker. Everything there is is a truthmaker. As noted above, truthmakers are not a special kind of entity—they’re any entity whatsoever. Consequently, the only sustainable way to think that there are no truthmakers is to think (falsely, it goes without saying) that nothing exists.<sup>67</sup>

Truthmaker maximalism is often taken to be the heart of truthmaker theory.<sup>68</sup> Frequently, in fact, “truthmaker theory” or “the truthmaker principle” is identified with truthmaker maximalism. For example, Milne writes: “Truthmaker theory maintains that for every truth there is something, some thing, some entity, that makes it true” (2005: 221). Marian David offers: “The *truth-maker principle* says that for every truth there is something

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<sup>66</sup>To my knowledge, Schaffer is the only author who disagrees with this argument, but his disagreement is motivated by his other metaphysical interests (i.e., priority monism) (2010).

<sup>67</sup>Rodriguez-Pereyra writes that “many people believe that there are no truthmakers and so that there is nothing in virtue of which true propositions are true” (2006c: 961). Rodriguez-Pereyra does not name names, but I am genuinely curious to hear how they would respond to the utterly uncontroversial argument of this paragraph. My guess is that any self-proclaimed truthmaker nihilist is simply dissociating himself from some non-existent strawman truthmaker theorist. Perhaps Rodriguez-Pereyra has Davidson in mind, who once claimed that “Nothing, however, no *thing* makes sentences and theories true” (1973-1974: 16). Davidson is here expressing his distaste for factive entities, among others (cf. Strawson 1950: 134-135). We know better, for truthmakers are not limited to facts. Understood in our sense, everything that exists makes some truth true. Maybe not all truths are made true in virtue of something, but it is beyond all doubt that some truths stand in the truthmaking relation.

<sup>68</sup>Advocates of maximalism include George Molnar (2000), Cameron (2008d), Schaffer (2010), and of course Armstrong (e.g., 2004). Julian Dodd (2002) and Merricks (2007) think that advocates of truthmaking *should* be maximalists. (And because maximalism is false, there should be no advocates of truthmaking!)

that makes it true, that every truth has a truth-maker” (2009: 137).<sup>69</sup> Maximalism obviously accompanies significant theoretical simplicity. But it runs into trouble in certain cases, most infamously negative truths. Consider, for example, the true negative existential *that there are no unicorns*.<sup>70</sup> A natural thought is that *that there are no unicorns* is true not in virtue of the existence of anything, but precisely because nothing of a certain kind exists.<sup>71</sup> If it does have a truthmaker, it’s highly contentious what it would be. Historically speaking, the debate over negative truths, and whether we must accept negative facts for them to correspond to, is already present in Russell (1985) and Wittgenstein (1921). Russell countenanced negative facts;<sup>72</sup> Wittgenstein abhorred them. Nowadays, many take negative truths to be counterexamples to maximalism.<sup>73</sup> For them, negative existentials are one source of truthmaker gaps. Others are more cavalier. As we have seen, Armstrong (following Russell 1985) expands his ontology with a totality state of affairs to find a truthmaker for negative existentials. Others try to make do with more meager resources, finding truthmakers for negative truths without turning to totality facts or negative facts.<sup>74</sup> Stephen Mumford

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<sup>69</sup>See also Kierland and Monton 2007: 489.

<sup>70</sup>Throughout this work, I shall be supposing, *contra* Kripke 1972, that *that there are no unicorns* is only contingently true. It strikes me that there is overwhelming linguistic evidence that unicorns are a perfectly possible creature.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Pendlebury 2010: 142.

<sup>72</sup>In so doing, Russell reports having “nearly produced a riot” at a seminar at Harvard (1985: 74). JC Beall (2000) and Dale Jacquette (2010) have recently taken them up.

<sup>73</sup>For instance, Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Bigelow 1988, Lewis 1992 and 2001b, Linsky 1994, Smith 1999, Dodd 2002 and 2007, Mellor 2003, Cameron 2005, Melia 2005, Mumford 2005, Simons 2005 and 2007a, Parsons 2006, and Merricks 2007.

<sup>74</sup>For instance, Demos 1917, van Fraassen 1969, Pendlebury 1986 and 2010, Hochberg 1994, Martin 1996, Heil 2000, Lewis and Rosen 2003, McGrath 2003, Cheyne and Pigden 2006, Kukso 2006, Cameron 2008a, and Veber 2008.

preserves maximalism by denying the existence of negative truths (2007a and 2007b).<sup>75</sup>

Some just end up in *aporia* (Molnar 2000). Here is Rodriguez-Pereyra: “one also has to find a truthmaker, for instance, for negative existential truths, like the truth that there are no penguins in the Northern Pole. What that truthmaker is, I don’t claim to know. All I claim is that there must be one” (2005: 31).

Those who retreat from maximalism endorse the existence of truthmaker gaps: truths that lack truthmakers. In so doing, however, they do not automatically abandon the truthmaking enterprise. Several theorists, although they reject maximalism, endorse a different thesis that they claim to be the essence of truthmaker theory. John Bigelow (1988) and Lewis (at least in his 2001b)<sup>76</sup> advocate the view that while some truths lack truthmakers, truths nevertheless supervene on being.<sup>77</sup> *That there are no Arctic penguins* is true not in virtue of the existence of some particular thing, but is nonetheless true in virtue of the way the world is. Thus, if two worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$  differ with respect to the truth of *that there are no Arctic penguins*, the difference obviously must involve there being Arctic penguins in one, but not the other. But in the world with no Arctic penguins, *that there are no Arctic penguins* is not made true by anything existing in the world, *contra* Armstrong. It is true in virtue of the fact that the world lacks any falsemakers—namely, Arctic penguins—for it. Bigelow and Lewis disagree on how to formulate their shared idea. Bigelow thinks that the difference must be one of existence—if two worlds are distinct in terms of what is true, that is because something exists in one of them but not the other. For Lewis, if two worlds are distinct in terms of what is true, that is because either there is a difference in what exists, or a difference

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<sup>75</sup>I have a hard time seeing how Mumford’s view is even coherent. For a brief refutation, see Simons 2007a.

<sup>76</sup>But see Lewis 2003 and Lewis and Rosen 2003 for a maximalist application of Lewis’s later approach to truthmaking that stands as his last word on the topic.

<sup>77</sup>Hofmann 2006 also endorses this view.

in the distribution of properties and relations among the things that do exist. (So, *contra* Bigelow, two worlds could agree on what exists, but be distinct nonetheless.) Bigelow's principle relieves him of the need to offer truthmakers for negative truths; Lewis's principle, in addition, relieves him of the need to offer truthmakers for contingent predications.<sup>78</sup>

We may next acknowledge other advocates of truthmaking who subscribe to neither of the above views, which Chris Daly describes as “stronger” and “weaker” versions of the truthmaker principle (2005: 85). Mulligan, Simons, and Smith advocate the view that only atomic truths have truthmakers (1984; Linsky 1994 agrees), whereas Rodriguez-Pereyra thinks that “necessarily the members of an important class of synthetic true propositions, including inessential predications, have truthmakers” (2005: 18).<sup>79</sup> Roy Sorensen defines the “truthmaker principle” as the thesis that “for each contingent truth there must be something in the world that makes it true” (2001: 171).<sup>80</sup> Barry Smith (1999) also considers a restricted view of truthmaking. So we seem to have several different ways that truthmakers have been advocated. We have those who, with Armstrong, believe that all truths have truthmakers. We have those like Bigelow and Lewis (2001b) who think that truths supervene on being, a view entailed by but not entailing Armstrong's stronger view. Finally, we have those who argue for various restricted versions of truthmaking—some, but not all truths have truthmakers.<sup>81, 82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Note that Armstrong's maximalism is stronger than the other two's views, such that he too thinks that truth supervenes on being.

<sup>79</sup>Notice also that Rodriguez-Pereyra adds necessity to his truthmaker principle. Other writers tend not to modalize the various truthmaker principles. Nothing will turn on the issue in what follows.

<sup>80</sup>See also Armstrong 1989b: 88.

<sup>81</sup>The Bigelow/Lewis view is also a kind of restricted view of truthmaking, but is often discussed separately from the other restricted views (as in Merricks 2007). So I too shall distinguish it from the others.

<sup>82</sup>Beware also of the ambiguity in the literature behind ‘the truthmaker principle’. Most commonly, it is taken to refer to truthmaker maximalism—that all truths have truthmakers. But Gerald Vision (2004: 254) and

### 1.3.2. The methodological approach to truthmaking

Each of the views we have canvassed so far are all particular *doctrines*: we have considered what it is to be an advocate of truthmaking by looking at some of the various theses to which advocates of truthmaking subscribe. Theorists typically begin with such a doctrine, and then set out to discover what truthmakers are needed to satisfy that doctrine. I suggest a different approach.<sup>83</sup> My suggestion is that we understand what it is to be an advocate of truthmaking as not a kind of doctrinal stance, but rather as a *methodological* stance.<sup>84</sup> That methodology is as follows: Metaphysics is the enterprise of giving a complete account of the nature of the world. Ontology, specifically, concerns questions of what exists. The truthmaking relation takes us from truths that we accept to what it is that exists that grounds those truths. So one way of doing ontology is to uncover the best account of what the truthmakers are for certain truths. We can accept that approach to ontology even before we commit to a strong thesis such as truthmaker maximalism, or that all truth supervenes on being. Starting with truths that we accept, we offer a theory of truthmakers for those truths.<sup>85</sup>

Now (and here is where I begin to differ from others who are concerned with truthmaking) when we reach a trouble spot, a spot where it is difficult to find a plausible truthmaker for some truth (or where a truth just seems like it does not require a truthmaker),

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Friederike Moltmann (2007: 385), by contrast, use it to refer to truthmaker necessitarianism—that truthmakers necessitate their truths.

<sup>83</sup>For more criticism of the doctrinal approach to truthmaker theory, see Liggins 2008.

<sup>84</sup>Hence I could not disagree more with the very first sentence of Dodd 2007: “To be a truthmaker theorist is to commit oneself to a principle stating that the members of a certain class of true propositions have truthmakers” (383). Without maximalism, Dodd rejects truthmaking as a “pointless” enterprise not worth pursuing (2002: 70, footnote 2; see also his 2007). Naturally, I disagree.

<sup>85</sup>The methodology I am here suggesting recommends moving in the direction from truths to truthmakers, not the reverse. That is not to say that the set of truths with which we begin our ontological investigations is immune from being questioned; we can expect some reflective equilibrium (as in Rawls 1971) to lead us to reject certain things we previously took to be true, given the results of our ontological inquiries. See chapter 3 of Armstrong 2004 for a more elaborate discussion of the direction of inquiry I am upholding.

we should pause and weigh our options. Since we have not yet committed ourselves to one of the doctrines surveyed above, we have choices in how to respond. Other accounts of truthmaking prejudice and limit the choices we have available to us when we are faced with troublesome cases. My ultimate suggestion is that by attending to those cases where truthmaking runs into the most trouble, we can offer a better doctrine of truthmaking that its advocates ought to adopt, and also shed light on the various realism/anti-realism debates that plague the metaphysical terrain. Proceeding in such a fashion, we shall not assume that all truths have truthmakers (or that all contingent truths have truthmakers, or that all atomic truths have truthmakers, etc.).<sup>86</sup> Yet it goes without saying that some truths have truthmakers. Our interest, then, will be in how we should react when we are unsure of whether some truth has a truthmaker, and what consequences it would mean for ontology depending on how we answer. Is there something that binds together the class of truths that lack truthmakers, be there any such class? If we think there are good grounds for saying that some truths lack truthmakers, can we give a principled account of when truths do have truthmakers, and when they do not? Does the distinction between those truths with truthmakers and those without offer anything by way of elucidating the various realism debates across philosophy? If so, can the notion of truthmaking be put to use in solving such disputes? Such questions, which will fuel much of this project, come to the fore when particular doctrinal stances are set to the side.

To better appreciate the methodology I am here advocating, it will be useful to contrast it with the competing approaches adopted by Armstrong and Merricks. First consider Armstrong's view. Armstrong heartily subscribes to truthmaker maximalism. But he also

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<sup>86</sup>In fact, we are continuing on the assumption that maximalism is false (for we are excluding analytic truths from having truthmakers). In other cases, such as negative existentials, we shall be as open minded as possible.

articulates how that doctrine invites a metaphysical methodology very much akin to what I am suggesting. He writes:

To postulate certain truthmakers for certain truths is to admit those truthmakers to one's ontology. The complete range of truthmakers admitted constitutes a metaphysics, which alerts us to the important point [...] that the hunt for truthmakers is as controversial and difficult as the enterprise of metaphysics. I think that proceeding by looking for truthmakers is an illuminating and useful regimentation of the metaphysical enterprise, or at least the enterprise of a realist metaphysics. But it is no easy and automatic road to the truth in such matters. (2004: 23)

Here Armstrong is suggesting that, equipped with the doctrine of truthmaker maximalism, we can be guided by a methodology that takes us from truths to truthmakers. How should we build our preferred ontology? Look to the truths that we accept, offer a theory of what truthmakers ground those truths, and read one's metaphysics off of the list of truthmakers.<sup>87</sup>

So far so good. However, Armstrong's commitment to truthmaker maximalism limits the options available to him when we encounter difficult cases in metaphysics. He goes on to write:

We take certain things to be true, and then ask what truthmakers these truths demand. It may be that at times we will think that we must have certain truthmakers, and as a result add to what we take to be our stock of truths. Or we might find ourselves unwilling to postulate certain truthmakers and therefore having to reject what we had previously taken to be truths. (2004: 26)

In difficult cases, we find ourselves with truths that we accept, and candidate truthmakers that those truths demand that we cannot accept. If we choose not to accept the candidate truthmakers, Armstrong says, we must give up the truths.<sup>88</sup> So we have two options: give up the truth, or countenance the truthmaker. What we cannot do is hold on to the truth, and reject its candidate truthmaker. Truthmaker maximalism prevents such an option: if all truths

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<sup>87</sup>This is not to say that truthmaker theory offers a unique account or criterion of ontological commitment in competition with Quine's (1948, 1960), as Cameron (2008c) thinks. We shall take up this topic in greater detail in section 4.2.

<sup>88</sup>An example of this strategy, to be explored in depth in chapter 5, may be found in J. L. Mackie's moral error theory (1977).

have truthmakers, then there is no possibility of accepting a truth but no accompanying truthmaker. To do so would be of a piece with the phenomenologists' or behaviorists' positing the truth of certain counterfactuals without also supplying an ontological ground for them.<sup>89</sup> It would be, in effect, cheating.

Guided by his commitment to truthmaker maximalism, Armstrong's methodology takes him to conclusions that others are loath to accept. One particularly uncharitable commentator chastises certain consequences of Armstrong's metaphysics as being "wrongheaded", "bizarre", "implausible", and "confused" (Melia 2005: 69). Infamously, Armstrong admits totality states of affairs into his ontology. Suppose the world has just two things, *a* and *b*, both of which instantiate the universal *F*. Here we have two states of affairs: *a*'s being *F*, and *b*'s being *F*. It is true in this world that everything is *F*. What makes it true that everything is *F*? A natural response is that *a* is *F*, that *b* is *F*, and *a* and *b* are all there is in this world. So everything is *F*. Armstrong takes seriously that response, and finds in it an additional state of affairs: *a* and *b*'s being all the things in the world. Since the initial two states of affairs fail to necessitate *that everything is F*, we do not yet have a truthmaker for it. We need to combine those two with our third totality state of affairs—a state of affairs that holds that all the first-order states of affairs are all the first-order states of affairs that there are.<sup>90</sup> Now we have necessitation, and a genuine truthmaker. Armstrong thinks his totality states of affairs are the best available option, and he offers as parsimonious an account of them as he can (for instance, he shows how they do double truthmaking duty by also handling negative existentials). Despite the bad taste they leave in others' mouths, totality

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<sup>89</sup>See Armstrong 2004: 1-3 for a discussion and history of the role that arguments against behaviorism and phenomenism have played in the truthmaker literature.

<sup>90</sup>See Armstrong 2004: 72-75 for his account of totality states of affairs, and Heil 2006 for criticism. Cheyne and Pigden humorously refer to totality states of affairs as "Porky the Pig facts" (2006: 254). Th-th-that's all f-f-folks!

states of affairs are embraced by Armstrong because he thinks they are the best solution to the problem of truthmakers for general and negative truths. Armstrong's methodology forces him, in full ontological honesty, to accept what he thinks are the best candidate truthmakers for such truths. Since he is not willing to reject all general truths as false, he owns up to what he takes the requisite metaphysical commitments to be.

One way to interpret Armstrong's approach to truthmaking is that he is more committed to truthmaker maximalism than he is to any particular preconceived metaphysical prejudices. If maximalism leads him to postulate totality states of affairs, then he will postulate totality states of affairs. If others are prejudiced against such things, the burden is on them to produce an alternative truthmaker, or to get out of the truthmaker game. One thing is apparent: in Armstrong's work on truthmakers, truthmaker maximalism is not up for question.

Now compare Armstrong's view on truthmaking with Merricks's (2007). Merricks (himself ultimately a critic of truthmaking, not an advocate) focuses on truthmaking as cheater catching. If the issue of cheating is simply a metaphysician postulating a truth without offering any truthmaker, Armstrong would agree. But Merricks goes further. Metaphysicians also cheat when they posit "suspicious" properties or entities as candidate truthmakers. So one can cheat even when proposing truthmakers for various truths. How is this possible? Merricks thinks that truthmaker theorists should build into their accounts of truthmaking substantial metaphysical commitments. Specifically, truthmaker theorists need to come equipped with an account of what sorts of properties or entities are suspicious. Then, if anyone offers a suspicious truthmaker, they can be disregarded as ontological cheaters. Hence Merricks writes:

To catch certain cheaters, Truthmaker must deem some properties to be suspicious. So a fully articulated Truthmaker would tell us which properties are suspicious and which are not. [...] A full account of which properties are suspicious is itself a full-blown metaphysics. Thus a fully articulated Truthmaker is not a neutral litmus test that competing theories must pass to be taken seriously. Instead, it is one of the competitors. (2007: 37)

Whereas Armstrong focuses on truthmaking as a way of discovering what should go into our ontology, Merricks focuses on using truthmaking to filter out views that we find unsavory.<sup>91</sup>

For Merricks, the truthmaker theorist starts with a metaphysical view, and then weeds out views that appeal to what he judges to be metaphysically suspicious. Of course, truthmaker theorists need not come to the table with a fully sketched metaphysical theory. But they need to have some idea of what is allowable as a truthmaker and what must be disallowed, if truthmaking is to fulfill its goal of catching ontological cheaters.

Different methodologies lead to very different reactions in troubling cases of truthmaking. Consider once again negative existentials: it is true, for example, that there are no unicorns. What is it in the world that grounds that truth? Committed to truthmaker maximalism, Armstrong finds the best candidate truthmaker he can, and embraces it: totality states of affairs. Lewis (1992, 2001b), Melia, and Merricks, among others, find totality states of affairs unacceptable, and use negative existentials as counterexamples to truthmaker maximalism. In the hands of George Molnar, someone committed both to maximalism and the suspiciousness of totality states of affairs, the case of negative existentials leads to *aporia*: “We need positive truthmakers for negative truths but we have no good theory of what these

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<sup>91</sup>The difference in focus is perhaps best explained by the fact that one of Merricks’s favored metaphysical views, presentism, has been argued against in the name of truthmaking. Presentism, it is said, advocates the existence of truths about the past while explicitly denying that the things those truths are about exist. Hence presentism is accused of cheating, of trying to earn truths without the requisite metaphysical commitments. See Lewis 1992: 219, Bigelow 1996, Sider 2001, Armstrong 2004, chapter 11, Keller 2004, Parsons 2005, Crisp 2007, Heathwood 2007, Kierland and Monton 2007, Merricks 2007, chapter 6, Stoneham 2009, Tallant 2009a and 2009b, and Goff 2010 for related discussion.

might be. [...] It is an impasse and at present I cannot see the way out” (2000: 85; recall also Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005: 31).

The methodology I have prescribed for advocates of truthmaking avoids the doctrinal commitments that Armstrong and Merricks both require. Both kinds of doctrines are risky additions to truthmaker theory. First, Armstrong admits that he does not have an argument for truthmaker maximalism, the doctrine that informs his approach to truthmaking.<sup>92</sup> Rather, he simply hopes that “philosophers of realist inclinations will be immediately attracted to the idea that a truth, any truth, should depend for its truth on something ‘outside’ it, in virtue of which it is true” (2004: 7; see also his 1989b: 89). Bigelow says much the same:

I have sometimes tried to stop believing in the Truthmaker axiom. Yet I have never really succeeded. Without some such axiom, I find I have no adequate anchor to hold me from drifting onto the shoals of some sort of pragmatism or idealism. And that is altogether uncongenial to me; I am a congenital realist about almost everything. (1988: 123)

Armstrong and Bigelow both announce their instant and automatic attraction to truthmaking. Both cite canonical cases of cheaters (phenomenalists, behaviorists) as instances where the fundamental idea behind truthmaking seems to have been violated. Truthmaker theory seems to say exactly what is wrong with such theories. Still, many have wondered whether the gut instinct motivating Armstrong and Bigelow is enough to justify belief in maximalism. (Indeed, Bigelow ends up *not* believing in truthmaker maximalism). Lewis captured the sentiment of many when we wrote:

All too often, philosophical positions posit truths that fail to supervene on being. Consider phenomenalism, with its brute counterfactual truths about nonexistent

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<sup>92</sup>Nor does anyone else seem to have a good argument for maximalism, though Cameron attempts one in his 2008d. He thinks that all truths need truthmakers because he thinks that all truths require grounds, and takes for granted (falsely) that grounding can only be accomplished by truthmaking (see section 4.2). Cameron also thinks (again falsely) that truthmaker theory is a theory of truth, and so applies across the board (see chapter 2). And, finally, Cameron (falsely) equates the project of giving truthmakers with the project of giving “reasons for truth” (108). See section 1.4 for the problems with this view.

experience. Armstrong has told us how Charlie Martin long ago persuaded him to smell a rat. [...] Right! But the way Martin explained the bad smell, namely as the stink of truths without truth-makers, cast suspicion not only on the ratty counterfactuals that we deserved it, but also on innocent negative existentials and predications. By all means find something wrong with phenomenal counterfactuals. But if my denial that there are arctic penguins is likewise true without benefit of any truth-maker, true just because there aren't any arctic penguins to make it false, then is it really a companion in guilt? (1992: 218-219)

Lewis is here acknowledging what is right about truthmaker theory, and for what purpose it can be used. But, he thinks, truthmaker maximalism is the wrong response to phenomenalism *et alia*. He who offers no truthmaker for *that there are no Arctic penguins* is different in kind from he who offers no truthmaker for *that if I were to be staring at an emerald, I would be having a greenish experience*. The latter is guilty, certainly. But the former is no companion in guilt. Lewis does not here tell us why one is a cheater, and one is not. (Though he suggests that the phenomenalist is somehow denying supervenience.) Yet if we are not going to advocate truthmaker maximalism, we will want a principled account of when truths do have truthmakers, and when they do not. Such an account has not been offered, and one goal of this project is to move toward forming one.

Truthmaker maximalism, as we have seen, is a very controversial thesis. Some think it is quite appealing as is; others think the thesis far outstrips its motivation. On the latter view, there is something right about truthmaking, but not enough to justify maximalism. I have no argument for it, and neither does Armstrong, its biggest supporter. Besides, we have already argued against it. But even setting aside negative existentials and analytic truths, we still have to face the question whether there are any more truthmaker gaps to be found. (Ethical truths? Mathematical truths? Certain counterfactuals?) Without being committed to some restricted maximalist doctrine from the outset, we can entertain the thought that perhaps there are more truths that lack truthmakers. Furthermore, had we been committed to

maximalism from the outset, we could not have explored the live possibility that truthmaker theory might be misapplied to the class of analytic truths. Armstrong's methodology forbids such explorations. My hypothesis is that we can make some metaphysical progress by attending to the similarities among truths where we may be disinclined to supply truthmakers. Thinking about truthmaker gaps might also shed some light on various realism debates across philosophy. If so, we should keep an open mind as to which truths have truthmakers, and which do not.

Merricks's methodology is also risky in that it must build into truthmaker theory an opinionated stance as to what kinds of thing exist. Being front-loaded with metaphysical prejudice, then, it's unclear how considerations involving truthmaking can help make progress in ontological debates. Truthmaking on Merricks's conception is not of much utility for building one's ontology. One must already have an ontology, and then use truthmaking principles to refute competing metaphysical views. But where does one acquire one's metaphysical preferences and prejudices? Armstrong looks to truthmaking; Merricks obviously cannot, for on his view we can wield the notion of a truthmaker only after we have committed ourselves ontologically. Hence there is a substantial gulf between Armstrong's truthmaking as ontology building and Merricks's truthmaking as cheater catching.

Given that I am starting this inquiry as metaphysically neutral as possible, I cannot accept Merricks's truthmaker methodology any more than I can accept Armstrong's. Besides, I think it is of less philosophical interest to label someone a cheater than it is to put on full display his or her full metaphysical commitments. One might, should he be naturally suspicious of totality states of affairs (or any kind of states of affairs for that matter), be inclined to call Armstrong a cheater. A more substantive response, however, is to appreciate

Armstrong's proposed metaphysics, and then evaluate it according to all the traditional modes of theory choice with which we normally operate. We might think that the benefit of advocating truthmaking is that it enables us to saddle the phenomenalist (*et alia*) with cheating. My suggestion to the contrary is that advocating truthmaking enables us to see that the phenomenalist is committed to a metaphysics with brute counterfactual truths. Does that make him a cheater? Only if his view is conclusively untenable. But in philosophy, diversity reigns, and the expanse of logical space is far and wide. Philosophers hold radically different views, and consensus is hard to find. To call a philosopher a cheater is to assume from the outset that the philosopher's view simply cannot be true, or is somehow against the "rules" (whatever those might be!) of philosophical discourse. But where is the knock down argument against the possibility of brute counterfactual truths about perceptual experiences? Or consider Marc Lange's (2009) view of laws of nature, which depend for their existence upon the truth of certain counterfactuals (the truth of which is then taken to be metaphysically brute). Contemporary philosophical consensus may be naturally prejudiced against such views, but that does not mean that they are not fair playing contenders. (No one who plunged into the depths of *Laws and Lawmakers* would be inclined to call Lange a philosophical cheat.) Yet in labeling a view as a cheat, we seem to be excluding it from the possible positions we might hold, or that can be held in good philosophical conscience. If such views are cheaters by default, then there can be no hope of reasonable discourse between them and anyone interested in truthmaking. The virtue of truthmaker theory is that it exposes to the world the ontological and metaphysical commitments that a proponent of a certain view must accept. Truthmaking is a call to ontological honesty. Once a proposed ontology is exposed, we can take it or leave it. I see no advantage in further labeling views

we may wish to set aside as cheaters, as if such views do not count as legitimate, fair playing philosophical contenders.

I suggest, then, that we set aside both an explicit commitment to any particular truthmaking doctrine, and also the inclination to saddle unsavory philosophical views as cheaters.<sup>93</sup> We want to make progress in ontology, and a methodology closer to Armstrong's will enable that. What is dissatisfying in Armstrong's methodology is his unshakable commitment to truthmaker maximalism, for which he himself admits he has no argument despite its being a most contentious and substantial metaphysical thesis. Further, my hope is to reach some philosophical insight by contemplating the class of truths that lack truthmakers, however large. So we must be open to the possibility that some truths—even purely synthetic truths—lack truthmakers. We can allow ourselves to be *methodological maximalists*—we may assume initially that any given truth has a truthmaker. Hence we can understand ontology building as a kind of search after truthmakers. But when we run into troublesome cases, we may, upon seasoned reflection, decide that the best response is that the truth requires no truthmaker.<sup>94</sup> Not much work has been done on the question of when or why certain truths lack truthmakers. Any maximalist simply does not entertain the possibility. Others take it to be obvious that some truths lack truthmakers, but we have yet to see a systematic investigation into the distinction between truths that have truthmakers, and those

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<sup>93</sup>Similarly, I do not at the outset want to assume the truth of the Bigelow/Lewis principle that truth supervenes on being. Like most others in the literature, I find the view rather appealing and fairly plausible, more so than the stronger thesis of truthmaker maximalism. But Merricks contests it (see chapter 4 of his 2007), as does Jody Azzouni (2006), and we may see reason later on to reject it as well in certain cases. See also Kierland and Monton 2007 for doubts.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Tallant 2009b: 414-415.

that do not. The hypothesis of this work is that by attending to that distinction, we will be led to fruitful metaphysical insight.<sup>95</sup>

#### 1.4. Conclusion

We have now explored the first two topics that any truthmaker theorist must confront: what the truthmaking relation is, and which truths stand in it. We have argued in favor of **TM**, that view that truthmakers are things that properly ground and necessitate purely synthetic truths. And we have adopted *methodological maximalism*, which does not outright assume the bold metaphysical thesis that all truths have truthmakers, but instead is open to the possibility that there are truthmaker gaps (even beyond analytic truths). Methodological maximalism respects the legitimacy of truthmaker theory, and posits truthmakers when they are needed. But as the maximalism is merely methodological, it is also open to considering the existence of truths without truthmakers (even synthetic ones), and then to assess what relevance such truths have for metaphysical views that arise during philosophical debate.

There is a third question that faces truthmaker theorists: what truthmakers are there? Having settled what a truthmaker is, and when and where we need to look for them, the natural next step is to offer an account of just what truthmakers there are. Giving an answer to this third question is by no means an easy task. As noted by Armstrong above, to give an account of what truthmakers there are just is to give a metaphysics. For everything that exists is a truthmaker (and there are no non-existent truthmakers!), so to give an exhaustive account

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<sup>95</sup>Compare Hartry Field's methodological deflationism about truth: "All I really hope to motivate here is that we should be "methodological deflationists": that is, we should start out assuming deflationism as a working hypothesis; we should adhere to it unless and until we find ourselves reconstructing what amounts to the inflationist's relation "S has the truth conditions p". So methodological deflationism is simply a methodological policy, which if pursued could lead to the discovery that deflationism in the original sense ("metaphysical deflationism") is workable or could lead to the discovery that inflationism is inevitable" (1994a: 263).

of what truthmakers there are is tantamount to offering a full ontological inventory. It is no goal of this project to accomplish quite so much. Nor shall we be taking on the much more modest task of offering truthmaker arguments for the existence or non-existence of certain kinds of entities. Armstrong, famously, uses truthmaker arguments to insist on the reality of states of affairs (see, for example, his 1997 and 2004). Others think the existence of tropes falls out of truthmaker arguments (e.g., Cameron 2008a). Lewis ingeniously uses ordinary objects under counterpart relations as truthmakers (2003). It is not my intention to enter into this fray. Rather, I want to employ truthmaker theory for purposes for which it has yet to be applied. Specifically, I am interested in what truthmaker theory has to tell us about the theory of truth, and what it has to tell us about the issues surrounding realism and anti-realism. Having settled the necessary preliminaries, we can now proceed and approach those new topics.

In closing, let me make one final comment about how I think we should approach truthmaker theory. It is sometimes claimed that truthmaker theory is an *explanatory* theory, or that the truthmaking relation is an explanatory relation.<sup>96</sup> While I do not contest that truthmaker theory offers explanations, I think that the appeal to explanation here (as with similar claims elsewhere in philosophy) is either hopelessly vague or trivial and uninformative. *Every* philosophical theory is explanatory. *Every* philosophical investigation hopes to produce explanation, understanding, elucidation, illumination, etc. There is nothing special about truthmaker theory that makes it particularly explanatory. Indeed, the claim that

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<sup>96</sup>See, for instance, McFetridge 1990, Molnar 2000: 82, Daly 2005, Liggins 2005, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, Smith and Simon 2007, Vision 2010, and Schulte Forthcoming. Ian McFetridge's "truthmaker principle", also endorsed by David Liggins, is the following: For every sentence which is true there must be some explanation of why it is true (1990: 42). The principle looks to me more like an offering of the principle of sufficient reason rather than something distinctly involving truthmakers. (Though there might be something to the suggestion that truthmaker maximalism offers a reading of just what the principle of sufficient reason is.) Casting further suspicion on his associating his principle with truthmaking, McFetridge immediately (and rather dubiously) goes on to associate truthmaking with Tarski-style theories of truth. See Dodd 2000: 16, endnote 10.

truthmakers explain their truths is empty, absent some account of what counts as an adequate explanation.

I flag this point only because the appeal to explanation has led to considerable misunderstanding about the project of truthmaker theory, and has led some to dismiss it all too quickly. For example, on nearly all accounts,<sup>97</sup> I am a truthmaker for *that a human exists*. Do I plausibly serve as an explanation for the truth of *that a human exists*? My existence is definitely a metaphysically sufficient condition for the truth of *that a human exists*. But I wonder in what contexts, in the actual world where there are plenty of other humans around, my existence would be considered an adequate explanation. I imagine that someone who wanted to know why it is true that a human exists would prefer an explanation that relied on evolutionary principles, or perhaps theological ones. There may be contexts where offering the existence of a truthmaker does count as an adequate explanation of some truth. But there are contexts where it does not. What, then, is it for the truthmaking relation to be explanatory? Must it be explanatory in every context? At least one? The former answer is impossibly demanding, the latter trivially satisfiable (just imagine a context where offering a sufficient condition counts as an explanation). Absent any further account of what is required, the requirement that truthmaking be explanatory is empty. In any event, it is deeply mistaken to think that there is one single explanation of any given truth. Quite to the contrary, there is a giant multiplicity of explanatory projects. The notion of explanation is deeply contextual and pragmatic, and the practice of giving and asking for explanations can be appreciated only by

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<sup>97</sup>The notable exception again being Schaffer 2010.

understanding just what sort of explanatory demand has been made, and what would count as a satisfactory answer to a given explanatory request.<sup>98</sup>

Hence, I think that it is simply unhelpful and uninformative to label truthmaker theory as a kind of “explanatory theory”, as if that title earned it any special philosophical distinction. As I have been urging, what is illuminating about truthmaker theory is that it offers an attractive approach to asking and answering specifically ontological questions, questions about what there is. Truthmaker theory speaks to questions about what there must be in the world in order for various truths to be true. Those not interested in such ontological questions will not feel the pull of truthmaker theory. But that some are not bitten by the ontological bug is no objection to the legitimacy and interest of the truthmaking enterprise. Their explanatory demands simply are not ours. One might call the business of offering truthmakers a kind of “ontological explanation”, as in Smith and Simon 2007. Speak however you prefer. I only urge that we wield the notion of explanation very hesitantly. Truthmaker theory does provide ontological illumination; it in no way provides complete or exhaustive illumination about any particular truth. It is a mistake to think that it was ever intended to do so.

### 1.5. Appendix: truthmakers and truth-conditions

Thus far, our investigations have been thoroughly metaphysical. To embrace a collection of truthmakers is to embrace a metaphysics. Still, it will be worthwhile to explore

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<sup>98</sup>Obviously I am presupposing that the notion of explanation is contextual. But how can that be denied? The contextual nature of explanation should be recognized for what it is: plain Moorean fact. The sooner philosophers realize this the better. It is simply evident that there is no single explanatory request for some simple truth, say, that Adam ate the apple. Why did *Adam* eat the apple? Why did Adam *eat* the apple? Why did Adam eat *the apple*? For a single truth, we have several explanations, depending on the contrast class generated by the request. Which explanation is appropriate is a matter that must be settled (at least in part) by context. I borrow the example (and general approach to explanation) from van Fraassen 1980: 127.

briefly what connections there may be between truthmakers, on the one hand, and the semantic concepts of *truth-condition* and *meaning* on the other. Such an investigation may be useful even if only to clear up or anticipate any potential misconceptions that may still be lurking about the notion of truthmaking. Others have conflated the notion of a truthmaker and the notion of a truth-condition (e.g., Blackburn 1986: 119 and Vision 2003; see also Jacquette 1996 and 2010 for overly-semanticized accounts of truthmaking). The point of this appendix is to forestall anyone making such an identification. I do not think that the notion of truthmaking can or should play any pivotal role in the philosophy of language, as I think it can in metaphysics.<sup>99</sup> Still, let us pause to explore how we should understand the relationship between truthmaking and the theory of meaning.<sup>100</sup>

First off, we can set aside for the most part the family of “use” theories of meaning. Such theories draw their inspiration from the work of Wittgenstein (1953) and Wilfrid Sellars (1954), and perhaps have reached their highest sophistication in the work of Robert Brandom (1994). Use theories offer accounts of the meaning of natural language statements by appealing to social practices and conventions. Words and sentences have their meanings in virtue of the roles they play in certain kinds of social practice. What is absent from the foreground of such theories is the notion of truth. Meanings of statements are determined via their social roles, not via their truth-conditions. Thus, use theories of meaning and truthmaker theory seem to be orthogonal to one another. Our attention, then, shall focus on theories of meaning that incorporate the notion of truth-conditions.

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<sup>99</sup>Cf. Vision 2005: “There is all the difference in the world between identifying truth-conditions and identifying their satisfaction” (376).

<sup>100</sup>See also Mellor 2009: 278-280.

For truth-conditional accounts of meaning, we must turn first, of course, to the work of Davidson (e.g., his 1967 and 1984). The basic idea behind Davidson's semantic project is that (at least part of) a theory of meaning for a language is given by a Tarski-style semantic definition of truth for that language (Tarski 1956). That definition of truth will consist of a number of axioms that serve to satisfy Alfred Tarski's "Convention T", which states that an adequate definition of truth must entail a series of "T-sentences" conforming to the following schema:

(T)  $s$  is true if and only if  $p$ .

Here ' $s$ ' stands for some sentence in the language, and  $p$  gives the truth-condition for that sentence. A definition of truth for a language in Tarski's sense will offer an instance of **T** for every sentence of the language. The collection of such axioms constitute (or partially constitute) a theory of meaning for a language. Hence Davidson writes:

the definition [of truth] works by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence, and to give truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence. To know the semantic concept of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence—any sentence—to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language. (1967: 310)

At the very least, then, a complete theory of meaning for a language will offer the truth-conditions for each sentence belonging to it. Now, the relationship between  $s$  and  $p$  will not always be one of disquotation. Not all sentences wear their "logical form" on their sleeves. The linguist and/or philosopher bears the burden of giving a satisfying account of the correct logical form of certain sentences. To name one common example, Davidson argues that certain sentences that involve change entail that there are events. Since Davidson accepts that some sentences involving change are true, he embraces a metaphysics of events (1966).

By contrast with Davidson's "extensional" approach to truth-conditions, other philosophers have advocated "intensional" approaches to meaning (e.g., Lewis 1970). Briefly, according to such views, the meaning of a sentence can be identified with the set of possible worlds in which that sentence is true.

In order to ask what the relationship is that holds between truth-conditions and truthmakers, we must know what truth-conditions are. On the Lewisian approach, truth-conditions are sets of possible worlds. For Davidson, truth-conditions are given by the right-hand side of his T-sentences. Davidson might therefore think of truth-conditions linguistically—they are sentences, propositions, or states of affairs (linguistically understood, not objectually like Armstrong and Mellor). Either way, we can see an important difference between truthmakers and truth-conditions.

Let us attend first to truth-conditions in the spirit of Davidson. Except in rare cases, truthmakers will not be truth-conditions. I am not a truth-condition for any sentence; neither are you. But we are truthmakers. Here is the rare case: Taking truth-conditions to be propositions (and propositions to exist), the proposition that there are propositions is both a truth-condition for 'There are propositions' and a truthmaker (but not the only one) for 'There are propositions' as well. If truth-conditions exist, they like everything else will be a truthmaker for at least some truth. But in most cases, a sentence's truth-condition will not be its truthmaker, as most sentences are not about truth-conditions. The proposition that snow is white is not a truthmaker for 'Snow is white', for there are worlds in which the proposition exists (for propositions are necessary creatures), but where 'Snow is white' is false.

The stark difference between truthmakers and truth-conditions is quite unsurprising. For one thing, only truths have truthmakers. Falsehoods do not have truthmakers. But truths

and falsehoods do not diverge on the subject of truth-conditions: they are both possessed of them. Further, while many truths have multiple truthmakers, it is not the case that any truth has multiple truth-conditions.<sup>101</sup> Take the truth *that there are humans*. Each and every human that exists counts as a truthmaker for that truth (assuming that we humans are essentially so). But the sentence ‘There are humans’ has a single truth-condition: that there be humans. Finally, note that the truthmaker theorist stresses the perhaps obvious point that truthmakers must exist. Truthmaker theorists may take no recourse to non-existent entities in their truthmaking theories. The very idea of truthmaking is founded on the idea that truths are grounded in reality—in what exists. So no advocate of truthmaking would ever cite something that does not exist as a truthmaker for some truth. Truthmakers must be found inside one’s ontology. (And, indeed, truthmakers are found *everywhere* inside one’s ontology.)

But it is not hard to imagine a truth-conditional theorist of meaning offering the following (admittedly optional) line of reasoning: The truth-conditions for falsehoods are non-existent states of affairs. The truth-condition for ‘Snow is green’ is the state of affairs of snow’s being green, and that state of affairs does not exist. So the truth-condition for ‘Snow is green’ is a non-existent state of affairs. Here we have an account of truth-conditions that appeals to what does not exist;<sup>102</sup> the analogous path is in no way open to the truthmaker theorist. Of course, one might instead say that the truth-conditions for false sentences are non-*obtaining* states of affairs. Here, the truth-condition for ‘Snow is white’ is the obtaining

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<sup>101</sup>Or so I assume. I am assuming that the truth-condition for, say, a disjunctive sentence is itself a disjunction, *not* that the sentence has two separate truth-conditions. But perhaps that assumption about the individuation of truth-conditions is not warranted without argument.

<sup>102</sup>I do recommend this line. It flirts too strongly with Meinongianism. I admit that I do not know what Davidson himself thinks truth-conditions are, because he does not believe in the existence of propositions, or of facts. Are they just further sentences? Why then are sentences not just their own truth-condition?

of the state of affairs of snow's being white. Such a view avoids recourse to non-existent states of affairs, but at the cost of embracing the existence of necessarily existing states of affairs, understood either Platonically or ersatzly. Such things, even if they exist, will typically not be truthmakers for those sentences for which they are the truth-conditions. No necessary being can be a truthmaker for a contingent truth.<sup>103</sup> No matter how one chooses to articulate what truth-conditions are, they will end up being importantly different from truthmakers.

Turning now to Lewis's intensional account of truth-conditions, we can bring out another fundamental contrast between the theory of truth-conditions and the theory of truthmaking. For Lewis, the meaning of a sentence is given by all the worlds in which the sentence is true. Let us then identify the truth-conditions of a sentence with the set of worlds in which that sentence is true. On that view, truth-conditions *just are* groups of possible worlds, and so it makes little sense to ask whether a sentence has different truth-conditions in different possible worlds.<sup>104</sup> But contrast that case with truthmaking. Here we can say that truths have different truthmakers in different possible worlds. I am a perfectly adequate truthmaker for *that there are humans*. Note that when I say that I am a truthmaker for *that there are humans*, it is implicit that I am taking myself to exist in the actual world, and that *that there are humans* is true in the actual world. Advocates of truthmaking, after all, search after the truthmakers (the things that exist in the actual world) for the truths that they accept (those things that are true in the actual world). So when I speak of  $x$  being a truthmaker for  $y$ , I am discussing a relation that obtains in the actual world. It would be false to say that

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<sup>103</sup>Proof: Suppose necessary being  $T$  makes true contingent proposition  $p$ . Hence, by **TM**, in every world in which  $T$  exists,  $p$  is true. But  $T$  exists in every world, and so  $p$  is true in every world. But that is impossible, since  $p$  is contingent.

<sup>104</sup>Thanks go to Keith Simmons here for explicitly pushing me on this point.

Batman is a truthmaker for *that there are humans*, for Batman does not exist. One's stock of truthmakers is exhausted by the contents of one's ontology. Moreover, it also would be false to say that Batman is a truthmaker for *that Batman exists*, because *that Batman exists* is not true, and hence not made true by anything.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, we can employ counterfactual language when discussing truthmaking. Batman *might* have been a truthmaker for *that there are humans*, had he only existed.

Further, although I am a truthmaker for *that there are humans*, I might not have existed, and hence might have failed to be a truthmaker for *that there are humans*. Furthermore, it might have turned out that none of the truthmakers for *that there are humans* existed, but that some other humans did in their place. In that counterfactual situation, there would have been truthmakers for *that there are humans*, but the stock of truthmakers available in that scenario would be completely disjoint from the actual stock of truthmakers. It might have been the case that Batman was the only human. If so, then he would be the sole (minimal) truthmaker for *that there are humans*. In more loaded language: there are possible worlds where the only humans that exist are humans that do not exist in the actual world. Nonetheless, in those worlds *that there are humans* is made true by the various (non-actual) humans that exist in those worlds. While we can speak truly when speaking counterfactually about truthmakers, the important point to remember is that truthmaking theorists are interested ultimately in what actually exists—truthmaking is first and foremost an ontological project. We certainly can describe what exists in non-actual possible worlds, but doing so is of no immediate help to determining *our* ontology, understood as the study of what (actually) exists.

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<sup>105</sup>I beg my reader to let us set aside for the moment the worrisome questions about fiction that call our attention to senses in which *that Batman exists* might be true.

Despite their differences, the modal reading of truth-conditions interacts in interesting ways with truthmaking. On the Lewisian view, when we ask after the truth-condition of a sentence, we are directed to a space of possible worlds. Similarly, when we ask after the truthmaker for a sentence, we also need to consider a space of possible worlds, for truthmaking is an irreducibly modal notion.<sup>106</sup> How do these two inquiries intersect? In general, the actual world always will belong to the set of possible worlds given by any particular truth's truth-condition. So will all the possible worlds in which the truth's truthmakers exist. Consider again the true sentence 'There are humans'. The truth-condition for 'There are humans' is given by the set of all possible worlds in which 'There are humans' is true (that is, the set of all possible worlds in which there are humans). So any possible world that includes a human being belongs to that set. Call that set 'S'. Since 'There are humans' is true (true in the actual world), our world  $W_{@}$  is a member of S. I am one of the several billion truthmakers for 'There are humans'. I (or one of my counterparts) also exist in many possible worlds. Since I am essentially human, in each and every world in which I exist, 'There are humans' is true. So every world in which I exist is a member of S. The same goes for every other truthmaker for 'There are humans'. So if we take the set of (actual world) truthmakers for 'There are humans', and then define a set of possible worlds that includes all the worlds where at least one of the (actual world) truthmakers for 'There are humans' exists, we will have a subset of S. In the present case, we in fact have a proper subset. For also included in S are possible worlds where the only humans that exist are ones that do not exist in the actual world. The world where Batman is the only human belongs to S, as does the one with only Billy Budd. The idea here is that there are possible worlds where a sentence is true, and yet none of its (actual world) truthmakers exist. That is not to say that *in that world* the

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<sup>106</sup>See Fox 1987 and Merricks 2007: 11-14 for why truthmaker theory requires an account of *de re* modality.

truth lacks a truthmaker. Billy Budd is a truthmaker for *that there are humans* in the worlds (but only in those worlds) where he exists. Billy Budd is no truthmaker for *that there are humans*, but he would have been had the world been graced with the existence of the lovable but unjustly doomed seaman.

Now let us generalize. Identify the truth-conditions of some sentence *s* with the set of possible worlds *S* that includes all and only those worlds where *s* is true. Suppose *s* is in fact true, and has some truthmakers, collected together in the set *T*. The set of possible worlds *U* in which at least one member of *T* exists is a subset, possibly a proper subset, of *S*. There are some cases where *U* and *S* will be coextensive. Consider the true sentence ‘Asay exists’. *S* is here given by the space of worlds where I exist. I of course am the truthmaker for ‘Asay exists’. Hence I appear to exhaust *T*.<sup>107</sup> The set of worlds in which at least one member of *T* (i.e., me) exists just is the set of worlds where ‘Asay exists’ is true. So here *U* and *S* are the same. But in many cases, *U* will be a proper subset of *S* because there are “merely possible” but non-actual *potential* truthmakers for many actual truths (like Batman for *that there are humans*). Also note that if we were maximalists (such that, necessarily, all truths have truthmakers), the truth-conditions of a sentence will give the space of possible worlds in which that sentence has a truthmaker. For any world in which some sentence *s* has a truthmaker is a world in which *s* is true. Any such world will belong therefore to the set of worlds given by the truth-condition of *s*. But as we just saw, some of the possible worlds given by the meaning of a sentence are of little interest to truthmaking. Truthmaker theorists are “actual-world chauvinists”, to borrow Armstrong’s phrase (1989a: 56). They want to

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<sup>107</sup>It might be thought that there are other truthmakers for ‘Asay exists’. For example, there is the mereological sum of myself and Cuba. So add that to *T*. Still, *T* will generate the same *U*, for there are no worlds where the mereological sum of myself and Cuba exists, but I do not. To generate a distinct *U*, we would need a truthmaker for ‘Asay exists’ that is wholly separate from me, and I fail to see what that could be.

know what exists in the actual world. That some merely possible thing makes true some sentence in another distant possible world is of no matter to real ontology. To find truthmakers, we must look to the actual world.<sup>108</sup>

The foregoing shows how the notion of truthmaking and the notion of truth-conditions come apart in fundamental ways. In essence, the former is an ontological notion, an instrument of metaphysics. The latter is linguistic, the tool of the philosopher of language. Still, truthmakers and truth-conditions are similar in their both being bonded to the notion of truth, and not only nominally. The Lewisian version of the theory of meaning and truthmaker theory both employ some overlapping modal metaphysics. The set of possible worlds that give the meaning to a sentence is the very same set of worlds that contain the potential truthmakers for that sentence (when that sentence does indeed have a truthmaker). There are no worlds, on pain of incoherence, that possess a truthmaker for *s* but that fail to be a world where *s* is true. But determining that set of worlds does not settle the question of what the *actual* truthmakers are for the *actual* truths in the *actual* world. Those questions are what fuel the truthmaking enterprise. The truth-conditions give us an array of possible worlds, but to find truthmakers we must look only around our own world.

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<sup>108</sup>The chauvinism here does not preclude in any way an interest in truths about other possible worlds. The truthmaker maximalist who thinks that there are true claims about other possible worlds must offer truthmakers for those truths as well. Armstrong himself is a fictionalist about possible worlds and sentences that employ them, but not about claims of possibility and necessity (1989a). He certainly is in the business of offering truthmakers for modal truths (see his 1989a, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2007). See Pawl 2010 for criticism of Armstrong's account of truthmakers for truths about possibility.

## 2. Truthmaking and Truth

In the last chapter, I proposed that we understand truthmaker theory not as requiring a commitment to a specific doctrine (such as the view that all truths have truthmakers), but rather to a particular kind of methodology. We should approach metaphysical questions by considering whether certain kinds of truths have truthmakers, and what they might be. But we should not assume antecedently that any particular truth does have a truthmaker. We should pay particular attention to troublesome cases, and to what insights we can draw from the set of truths that we take, upon reflection, to require no truthmaker. We have already seen how being open to the possibility of truthmaker gaps in certain domains allows us to take a more nuanced approach to ontological issues surrounding analytic truths.

In this chapter I want to take up another question that also is related to how we should understand the nature of truthmaker theory. Does the theory of truthmaking offer a theory of truth? Or is truthmaker theory a separate enterprise from the theory of truth? Put another way: is truthmaker theory a competitor with the traditional theories of truth (correspondence, coherence, pragmatism, epistemicism, deflationism), or is it another kind of beast altogether?<sup>1</sup> Some take it to be obvious that truthmaker theory offers a theory of truth, while others think truthmaker theory in no way offers a theory of truth. The difficulty in the question over whether truthmaker theory offers a theory of truth is accentuated by the difficulty regarding what the nature is of correspondence theories of truth. For those who think that truthmaking offers a theory of truth often think that truthmaker theory just is a

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<sup>1</sup>One thing seems fairly uncontroversial: truthmaker theorists are not interested in giving the *meaning* of the word 'true' for natural language speakers. See Smith and Simon 2007 and Horwich 2008.

correspondence theory of truth (or perhaps a new and improved version). But the correspondence theory has long been an elusive creature, and radically different theories have been associated with the name.<sup>2</sup> The confusion involved in attempting to articulate what correspondence theories are inevitably bleeds into the problem of deciding whether truthmaker theory should itself be understood as a kind of correspondence theory.<sup>3</sup>

I shall argue that truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth, and thus *a fortiori* is not any kind of correspondence theory of truth. By ‘theory of truth’ I mean any theory that attempts to give an account of the nature of truth. The paradigm examples are familiar: there are correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, epistemic, and deflationary accounts. Recalling again the terminology of Lewis 1983, not all accounts need be analyses (or otherwise reductive).<sup>4</sup> One might, like Davidson and Frege, take truth to be primitive.<sup>5, 6</sup> Regardless of

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<sup>2</sup>For instance, the correspondence account defended by Russell (1912, 1985) is distinct from the view defended by J. L. Austin (1950, 1961), and both are quite different from the view Davidson defends (see the relevant discussions in Kirkham 1992 and Künne 2003). In his 1969, Davidson calls his view a correspondence account, but later retracts the identification (1990: 302). Sometimes (and quite baffling, in my opinion) the correspondence theory is identified with the causal theory of reference (see Leeds 2007: 2, which is following Kitcher 2001 and 2002; cf. Lynch 2009). This usage may well trace back to the influence of Field 1972.

<sup>3</sup>Another roadblock to answering our current question involves the obscurity involved in what it is to offer a theory of truth at all. See Soames 1984 for discussion of the issue, and Lynch 2009 for a more contemporary approach to the question.

<sup>4</sup>Here I part ways with Merricks, who thinks all accounts are analyses (2007: 14). As a result, Merricks’s own theory of truth—primitivism—does not count, by his own lights, as an account of truth!

<sup>5</sup>Slightly muddying the waters, Davidson and the others sometimes speak of the *definition* of truth, not an analysis of it. Davidson specifically discusses how it is a mistake to define truth. I take it by ‘define’ here he means what others mean by ‘analyze’. For if not, then in Davidson’s view lexicographers have been making fools of themselves, for the entry for ‘truth’ is filled in every dictionary worth its salt.

<sup>6</sup>For defenses of primitivism, see Moore 1899, Russell 1904, Frege 1956, Cartwright 1987, Davidson 1990 and 1996, Sosa 1993a and 1993c, McGinn 2000, Wiggins 2002, Lowe 2007 and 2009, and Merricks 2007. Alexander Nehamas attributes primitivism to Nietzsche (1998: 243, endnote 57). I also detect it in Descartes (1991: 139; AT II: 597). Armstrong himself comes close to admitting something like primitivism (2004: 17), and Schaffer admits sympathy with the view (2008a: 309). Note that Vision (2004), quite idiosyncratically, considers primitivist views to be species of nihilism. He claims to be following Soames 1999 in this, but Soames actually identifies “nihilism” with the redundancy view of truth (and in turn claims to be following Tarski (1969: 66) in this identification).

whether truth can be analyzed into further more basic concepts or not, one thing, I shall argue, is clear: truth cannot adequately be analyzed in terms of truthmaking.

The layout of this chapter is as follows. First, I explain why many theorists think that truthmaker theory does offer a theory of truth; in particular, many truthmaker theorists view truthmaker theory as offering an improved version of a correspondence theory of truth. Next I distance myself from the arguments of other theorists who share my conclusion that truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth. Understanding where their arguments go wrong will help us better understand the nature of truthmaker theory. Having set those faulty arguments aside, I offer my own argument for why truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth. Finally, I return to the topic of why so many have seen correspondence in truthmaking, and offer a diagnosis of why truthmaker theory is thought to capture the best of correspondence theories. In a sense, I do agree with those who see correspondence in truthmaking: truthmaker theory does capture what's important about correspondence theories of truth, but it maintains those theoretical virtues in spite of not offering a theory of *truth*. As a result, truthmaker theory promises to uphold the virtues of correspondence theories without incurring the same costs.

### 2.1. Seeing truth in truthmaking

The assumption that truthmaker theory offers a theory of truth is quite prevalent. Many simply seem to take it for granted that truthmaker theory offers a theory of truth (Armstrong 1997, Newman 2002, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006a, Clementz 2007). John O'Leary-Hawthorne and Graham Oppy present truthmaker theory as offering an account of the "hidden essence" of truth (1997: 175-176). Ross Cameron makes the connection fully

explicit, claiming that truthmaker theory “is a theory about *what it is* for a proposition to be true” (2008a: 412; cf. his 2008d: 108).

Perhaps even more commonly, theorists tend to accept that there is at least a close relationship, if not full identity, between truthmaker theory and the correspondence theory of truth. Adolf Rami observes that truthmaker theorists generally aim to “vindicate” the correspondence theory of truth (2009: 2).<sup>7</sup> Cameron writes that it is natural but not obligatory for advocates of truthmaking to accept a correspondence theory of truth (2008b: 263). Bigelow candidly equates the two (1988: 122), as do Molnar (2000: 85), and Josh Parsons (2009: 217).<sup>8</sup> Julian Dodd takes truthmaker maximalism “to be the distinctive intuition motivating correspondence theories of truth” (2000: 2). Stephen Read writes that the correspondence theory has experienced a “revival” in the form of truthmaker theory (2000: 67).<sup>9</sup> Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith present their trope-based truthmaker theory as a “philosophically non-neutral correspondence theory” (1984: 288-289). Fox (1987) and Michael Lynch (1998: 119) both seem to understand truthmaker theory as a kind of correspondence theory, and JC Beall’s discussion of truthmakers invokes the language of correspondence (2000: 266).<sup>10</sup> Bernard Linsky treats truthmaking as a necessary component of correspondence theories (1994: 192), whereas Mumford thinks that those attracted to correspondence will also be attracted to truthmaker theories (2007b: 313). Finally, Alex Oliver writes that the

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<sup>7</sup>Horwich agrees, though he thinks (alongside Rami) that they are unsuccessful in doing so (2008: 258).

<sup>8</sup>See also Dummett 1958-1959: 157 and 1976: 89, Bigelow and Pargetter 1990: 442, Rodriguez-Pereyra 1999, McGinn 2000: 90, Alston 2002: 11, Schantz 2002: 80, Bloomfield 2003: 513, Heathcote 2003, Alward 2004: 74, Mumford 2005, Beall and Glanzberg 2008: 171, Hochberg 2009, and Young 2009: 566.

<sup>9</sup>Sorensen seems to agree (2001, chapter 11), as does Stephen Neale (2001: 86).

<sup>10</sup>See also Searle 1995, chapter 9, Englebretsen 2010, and Fumerton 2010.

truth-maker principle is a sanitised version of a correspondence theory of truth, shorn of the unworkable idea of truth as a kind of pictorial resemblance, but retaining the doctrine that the world is independent of linguistic description and must be a certain way in order for a given sentence to be true of it. (1996: 69).

I think, then, that we should try to understand why so many have seen correspondence in truthmaking, even though they are not the same (and even though, as I shall argue in this chapter and the next, the latter undermines the former).

Again, many simply seem just to assume that truthmaker theory is a theory of truth. To understand why this assumption seems so natural, we may look to the truthmaker theory of Armstrong, who is perhaps the leading advocate for understanding truthmaking as a kind of correspondence theory. Armstrong writes that “the Correspondence theory tells us that, since truths require a truthmaker, there is something in the world that corresponds to a true proposition. The correspondent and the truthmaker are the same thing” (1997: 128; see also his 1997: 14, 2000: 150, and 2004: 16-17).<sup>11</sup> Armstrong’s motivation for thinking of truthmaking as a kind of correspondence theory draws from two sources. First, both the correspondence theorist and the advocate of truthmakers suppose truth to involve a relational notion. Specifically, they understand truth as a relational property. Something is true when it stands in a certain relation to something else. A common charge against the correspondence theorist is that the correspondence relation is left mysterious (see, for example, Cousin 1950 and Blackburn 1984b: 225-226). Armstrong argues that the truthmaker theorist has a solution: the long invoked correspondence relation just is the truthmaking relation. The truthmaking relation is a two-place relation that holds between truths and their truthmakers. So the murky notion of correspondence can be replaced by the much clearer notion of truthmaking.

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<sup>11</sup>Recall that even though Armstrong thinks truthmaker theory vindicates correspondence theories of truth, he does not think that truthmaking offers a reductive analysis of truth, for he recognizes that the truthmaking relation already takes for granted the notion of truth (2004: 17).

Second, Armstrong thinks that truthmaker theory shares with correspondence theories the goal of explicitly connecting truth with reality. According to the truthmaker maximalist, for any truth there is a truthmaker, something that exists in the actual world. There is no truth without some accompanying ontology. Correspondence theories also typically express the idea that truths are grounded in reality. Whether correspondence is cashed out as “truths corresponding with reality” or “truths corresponding to fact”, the driving idea behind correspondence theories seems to be that there is no truth without ontology. The language of “reality” and “fact” is thus employed. Correspondence theorists’ ontological interests are especially apparent when their view is contrasted with its coherentist and pragmatist competitors, whose notions of coherence and utility seem explicitly divorced from ontologically loaded notions like facts and reality. The slogan ‘no truth without ontology’ is central to both the truthmaker theorist and the correspondence theorist, and is one main reason why many have sought to identify the two views.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, Armstrong sees truthmaker theory (in its maximalist incarnation) as offering a preferable understanding of correspondence. In addition to identifying the correspondence relation with the truthmaking relation, he goes on to mention two additional advantages of taking correspondence to be truthmaking. First, every truthmaker theorist (with one exception) grants that the truthmaking relation is many-many.<sup>13</sup> For any given truth there are multiple truthmakers that make it true, and for any truthmaker there are infinitely many truths

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<sup>12</sup>There is a long tradition of claiming that the correspondence rhetoric that connects truth and reality is vacuous, and something that any theory of truth can adopt. While I have my reservations, the issue is one we cannot yet settle at the moment, but will take up later in section 2.4. Of related and more recent interest has been the question whether deflationists can embrace correspondence rhetoric. For discussion see (in addition to chapter 3) Rorty 1972: 662, Blackburn 1984b, Horwich 1990, Wright 1992, Searle 1998, Lewis 2001a and 2001b, Hill 2002, Daly 2005, Lynch 2009: 110, and Young 2009.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. what Kit Fine says regarding *circumstances* in his 1982. The exception here is Schaffer (2010), who is a monist about truthmakers: there’s only one truthmaker (the world), so his truthmaking relation is one-many.

that it makes true. I make it true both that I exist and that there are humans, and *that there are humans* is made true by each and every human. Hence truthmaker theory is not stuck with what Armstrong calls the “bane of the [traditional] correspondence theory”, namely, that the correspondence relation is one-one (2004: 16).<sup>14</sup> Presumably, the worry with a one-one correspondence relation is that it would require a very unparsimonious universe filled with a diversity of colorful kinds of facts. Since there are atomic truths, disjunctive truths, conjunctive truths, negative truths, and subjunctive truths among others, to account for them there would have to be atomic facts, disjunctive facts, conjunctive facts, negative facts, and subjunctive facts among others. Facts—at least when understood as objects, and not as mere nominalizations of true truth-bearers—are already metaphysical anathema to many philosophers. The additional kinds of facts that would be needed to sustain a one-one correspondence relation would be even more abominable. Recall the riot that Russell nearly ignited at that famous Harvard seminar. By casting off any suggestion of a one-one correspondence relation, one can avoid positing the existence of the more ontologically suspicious kinds of facts. The trade-off, however, is that one must put a more limited supply of facts to greater work.<sup>15</sup> Since we would prefer not to posit a unique fact for every truth, the truthmakers for some truths may prove elusive. As Armstrong observes, “The discovery of

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<sup>14</sup>As far as I can tell, the only philosophers who have ever explicitly embraced a one-one correspondence relation are Moore (1953: 256), William Alston (1996: 38) and John Searle (1995: 219). Armstrong never cites any philosopher who holds the one-one view, but repeatedly speaks of how the correspondence theory has long been saddled with it. I find his insistence somewhat puzzling, since Russell, Armstrong’s metaphysical predecessor and an early defender of correspondence, eschewed any kind of one-one correspondence between truths and facts.

<sup>15</sup>And here we open the door to many mysteries in the field of realism. How could there be such things as moral facts? But if there are none, then how can moral claims be true? Our truthmaking project is perfectly equipped to answer such questions, and we shall take them up in later chapters.

what are in fact truthmakers for a particular truth can be as difficult and controversial as the whole enterprise of ontology” (2000: 150).<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, Armstrong classifies the truthmaking relation as an internal relation. As such, on his view the relation is ontologically innocuous. According to Armstrong, an internal relation is one that supervenes upon its relata. If the relation obtains in every possible world in which the relata both exist, then the relation is nothing above and beyond its relata. The numbers 3 and 5, for instance, stand in the *less than* relation: 3 is less than 5. Now, in every world in which 3 and 5 exist, they stand in that very same relation. It is not the case that it is possible that 3 and 5 both exist, and yet 3 fail to be less than 5. Hence *less than* is an internal relation.<sup>17</sup> Armstrong claims that since internal relations supervene upon their relata, they are an “ontological free lunch”—they are no addition of being above and beyond the being posited by the relata. Hence internal relations can be “added” to one’s worldview at no additional ontological cost for they are already included; they are, in effect, “packaged together” with the base on which they supervene (Armstrong 1997: 129 and 2004: 9). As such, the truthmaking relation does not have to be considered a universal (in Armstrong’s sense, most elaborately presented in his 1978), or a “sparse” or “natural” relation (in the language of Lewis 1983). On Armstrong’s view, we should posit universals only when they are needed as truthmakers (or other kinds of metaphysical laborers). But we need no extra

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<sup>16</sup>Note that on a linguistic view of facts, a one-one correspondence between truth and fact is wholly unobjectionable. On the linguistic view, “Facts are not units of any sort, but are explained by how fact locutions are used, so that speaking about facts is merely a general way of speaking of how things are in the world” (Newman 2002: 142). The fact that snow is white *just is* the true proposition <Snow is white>. Certainly facts in the linguistic sense are no good as truthmakers. Any correspondence theory that relied on such a notion of a fact naturally would find correspondence to be vacuous (Searle 1998). P. F. Strawson famously captured that sentiment when he wrote: “Of course, statements and facts fit. They were made for each other. If you prise the statements off the world you prise the facts off it too; but the world would be none the poorer” (1950: 137). Cf. the distinction between *plebian* and *patrician* facts in Smith and Simon 2007.

<sup>17</sup>Other examples might include *being the same species as* and *being identical with*.

universals to stand underneath internal relations, as their existence is guaranteed by the existence of their relata alone.<sup>18</sup> Hence there is no relational universal *makes true*. Such a result is to be expected, since Armstrong and Lewis both conceive of the sparse properties and relations as being those that have causal powers. The truthmaking relation is decidedly not a causal relation, as all parties to the table agree. Hence Armstrong can identify the truthmaking relation in an ontologically innocuous way. There is no additional ontological commitment involved in positing a *making true* relation above and beyond the commitments involved in positing truths and their truthmakers. So Armstrong can avoid the classic charge often made against substantive theories of truth that says that the property of truth is metaphysically suspicious. Armstrong would agree. There is no thing, no *universal*, that all true sentences, beliefs, and the like have in common. We do not have to posit *truth* alongside *mass*, *charge*, and the like in our inventory of the world's universals; neither do we have to posit *makes true* as a fundamental, irreducible, or “natural” relation.<sup>19</sup>

Supposing that Armstrong's view of truthmaking as an internal relation is tenable (but see David 2005), it is clear why advocates of correspondence should be attracted to truthmaking. Truthmaking understood as an internal, many-many relation avoids many of the objections long associated with correspondence theories. At the same time, it is explicit about the appealing truth-ontology connection that has long made correspondence theories the “default” view of truth in the eyes of many. Truthmaker theory and traditional correspondence theories of truth certainly share much in common; such commonalities are

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<sup>18</sup>For a similar view, see Simons 2010.

<sup>19</sup>In the next chapter, I argue more forcefully against the existence of any such metaphysically robust understanding of truth.

responsible for convincing many that truthmaker theory offers a theory of truth. However, truthmaker theory does not offer a theory of truth, as we shall see in the following sections.

## 2.2. How not to separate truth and truthmaking

Not everyone thinks that truthmaker theory offers a theory of truth. Many have argued that there is a division of labor between theories of truth and theories of truthmaking.<sup>20</sup> I wholeheartedly agree. But before getting to my own argument, let me distance myself from arguments to the same conclusion by other writers. Some argue that truthmaker theory offers no theory of truth at all, while some offer arguments to the more specific conclusion that truthmaker theory is not a correspondence theory of truth. By seeing where these arguments go wrong, we can better understand the nature of truthmaker theory.

First let us consider those writers who resist the specific identification between truthmaker theory and correspondence theory. Chris Daly argues that truthmaking is not correspondence because while the latter is an equivalence relation, the former is not. Truthmaking must be understood as an explanatory relation, such that it is asymmetric and non-transitive (2005: 95). First, we might wonder why Daly thinks correspondence must be understood as an equivalence relation, and thus why any account of the correspondence theory that denied that correspondence was an equivalence relation would thereby be incoherent. In typical first pass formulations of correspondence theories, no mention is made of the logical properties of the relation. To say that all truths correspond to the facts or to reality is one thing; to say that the correspondence relation is an equivalence relation is another (completely optional) thing entirely. Perhaps Daly thinks that the everyday, non-

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<sup>20</sup>See Lewis 2001a and 2001b, Daly 2005, Merricks 2007, Smith and Simon 2007, Horwich 2008, David 2009, Mellor 2009, and Rami 2009.

philosophical notion of correspondence is an equivalence relation, and thus extends it to the philosophical case. But again, it is optional whether a robust philosophical theory of a certain name should take on the properties of everyday notions that happen to employ the same name. If there are theoretical merits to offering a correspondence theory that denies that correspondence is an equivalence relation, then I can see no conceptually mandatory reason to deny its formulation. At most, one might quibble about whether we should properly *call* such a theory a correspondence theory. I shall not dispute about a word; speak however you prefer. Thus I see no argument for why correspondence must be an equivalence relation, and Daly has none to offer either.

As for Daly's second premise, that the truthmaking relation must be an explanatory relation and hence asymmetrical and non-transitive, consider the following remarks. First, it goes without saying that explanation is a notoriously controversial notion, and in the truthmaker literature it is unclear just what role it is supposed to play. I have already taken up this contentious topic in the conclusion to the previous chapter (section 1.4). We should be hesitant when wielding the notion of explanation. Furthermore, even if it is granted that the truthmaking relation is explanatory, it does not follow that it has the properties Daly claims for it. For example, there are some accounts of explanation according to which explanation is not asymmetrical (e.g., van Fraassen 1980, chapter 5). Finally, it is evident that the truthmaking relation is not asymmetrical (nor is it symmetrical). There are cases of reflexive truthmaking (e.g., the proposition that there are propositions makes itself true), and so cases of symmetric truthmaking. Daly's argument provides no good reason for not identifying truthmaking with correspondence.

Next let us consider the view of Matthew McGrath, who also objects to the supposed identity between correspondence and truthmaking. McGrath (2003) argues against those who take truthmaker theory to motivate acceptance of a correspondence theory of truth (and hence rejection of deflationary views of truth), for McGrath thinks that deflationism and truthmaking are compatible (where deflationism and correspondence are not). To fuel his argument, McGrath distinguishes between two notions of truthmaking. There is existential truthmaking: truths have existential truthmakers when they are true in virtue of the existence of some worldly object. And there is non-existential truthmaking: truths have non-existential truthmakers when their truth is “accounted for” by something. McGrath admits that he does not have a “developed theory” of his notion of accounting, but the upshot of his view is that propositions are what account for truths (2003: 674). By way of analogy, he considers questions such as: What makes this painting beautiful? Another way to ask that question is: What *accounts* for this painting’s beauty? Here the request is not for some *thing* in any ontological sense, but rather a further *fact* (understood *not* in the way Armstrong, Mellor, and Russell understand facts; here facts just are truths). So it is a fact that the painting is beautiful, and that truth is accounted for by some further fact. Nowhere, however, is there a request for some extra ontology to ground the truths. Hence we have X accounting for Y, where X and Y are both propositions. The distinction between the two forms of truthmaking can be seen in the following two formulations (McGrath 2003: 683):

**(ABOUT)**     If a proposition is true, then something *about* the world makes it true.

**(IN)**             If a proposition is true, then something *in* the world makes it true.

Truthmakers, as conceived by all other parties to our debate, are the items *in* the world that make true truth-bearers true. McGrath's things that are *about* the world are propositions.<sup>21</sup> It is trivial, McGrath claims, that the proposition that snow is white is what accounts for the truth of *that snow is white*. The proposition that snow is white is about the world, and is what makes true *that snow is white* in the non-existential sense. So what makes it true that snow is white is just that snow is white.

McGrath's strategy is to say that "our basic truthmaking intuitions" (whatever those might be, even supposing there are such things) are completely exhausted by the principle given by **ABOUT**. But since the truthmaker literature has failed to distinguish **ABOUT** from **IN**, truthmaking advocates have confusedly attempted to account for their truthmaking "intuitions" by adopting **IN** and the subsequent metaphysical investigations and commitments that accompany it. But once we realize that **ABOUT** gives us enough to satisfy our truthmaking inclinations, we can see that there is no problem in saying that propositions make themselves true (in the non-existential sense). Saying as much is completely trivial. Furthermore, we lose the motivation for embracing **IN** and the whole business of searching after existential truthmakers. Having realized that non-existential truthmaking is the genuine kind of truthmaking, we can see that there is no basis for identifying it with the correspondence theory; in fact, McGrath draws the conclusion that non-existential truthmaking is perfectly consistent with deflationary views of truth.

I have severe reservations about McGrath's argument.<sup>22</sup> The better explanation for why the literature has not distinguished **IN** from **ABOUT** is not that it is blind to the

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<sup>21</sup>Though since McGrath takes propositions to exist, and therefore to be *in* the world, I do not see why **IN** doesn't just follow from **ABOUT**.

<sup>22</sup>See also Vision 2005: 368-371 for more criticism.

distinction, but that **ABOUT** is an empty principle. Truthmaking is motivated by the thought that truths are grounded in and depend upon reality, that there is a direct link between truth and ontology. **IN** makes that connection explicit. **ABOUT** speaks to it not at all. If **ABOUT** were all there were to truthmaking, then truthmaker advocates would be completely impotent at finding fault with theories that posited truths in the absence of any accompanying ontology. Consider the phenomenalist's admission of there being counterfactual truths about possible experiences that lack any ontological ground. On McGrath's view, the phenomenalist may claim that each of his true counterfactuals are made true (in the non-existential sense) by themselves, and thus he has satisfied the maximalist truthmaker theorist's demand for a truthmaker for every truth. Thus, if McGrath is right about truthmaking, then the very idea behind truthmaker theory, down to its very initial motivation, is thoroughly misguided. Where Armstrong and Martin say that truthmaking insights reveal the flaws in behaviorism and phenomenalism, McGrath would say that the "flaws" they detected are mere bogies. The phenomenalist's and behaviorist's counterfactuals satisfy all the demands of a proper understanding of truthmaking. After all, *every theory whatsoever* (even the inconsistent ones!) satisfies the demands of truthmaking, for every claim serves as a truthmaker for itself (in McGrath's sense). On McGrath's view, truthmaking cuts no metaphysical ice whatsoever.

Perhaps McGrath is right, and all "truthmaking intuitions" are satisfied by an empty principle. Armstrong, Bigelow, Lewis, Mellor, Schaffer, and the others are guilty of a simple conflation between real (non-existential) truthmaking and pie in the sky (existential) truthmaking. It is far more plausible, it seems to me, that McGrath simply does not share the pull of the truthmaking literature, and finds **IN** to be false. After all, many leading advocates of truthmaking take **IN** to be false; **IN** just is a statement of truthmaker maximalism, which

we have already argued against. McGrath seems driven to maintain the *words* ‘All truths have truthmakers’ by draining them of any content, and missing the spirit that originally supported them. It is not important to maintain words. The better view is that it might be the case that not all truths have truthmakers, and that there is something important to be noticed, something that can bring insight to metaphysical inquiry, about the differences between those truths that do have truthmakers, and those that do not.

Setting my deep reservations about McGrath’s view aside, it is still not clear that his argument is any threat to the supposed identity between truthmaker theory and correspondence theory. It is clear throughout his paper that McGrath thinks that existential truthmaking *can* reasonably be identified with the correspondence theory, whereas non-existential truthmaking is consistent with deflationism, and therefore not to be identified with the correspondence theory. McGrath, it is worth noting, thinks that he has an explanation for why talk of correspondence has sometimes been taken to be trivial, and sometimes substantive. If correspondence is cashed out in terms of non-existential truthmaking, then we see that the language of correspondence is consistent with any view of truth. But if correspondence is cashed out in terms of existential truthmaking, then we have a metaphysically substantive theory of truth on our hands (2003: 682). (McGrath assumes, falsely, that truthmaker advocates must posit factive entities like Armstrong’s states of affairs.) If we accept, as I am urging, that non-existential truthmaking is an empty notion that is of no interest to truthmaker theory, then we see that real truthmaking is existential truthmaking, which is, even on McGrath’s view, plausibly identified with correspondence.

Hence, McGrath's argument for the non-identity between truthmaking and correspondence rests on an implausible account of how truthmaking should be understood.<sup>23</sup>

David Lewis has also argued both that truthmaker theory is not the correspondence theory of truth, and, moreover, is no theory of truth at all. In a pair of provocative pieces, Lewis explores what is required for something to be a theory of truth (2001a, 2001b). Between the two papers, Lewis sets out to show that there are genuine theories of truth, but that correspondence theories and truthmaker theories do not number among their ranks. As for the weaker thesis, Lewis argues that truthmaking is not correspondence because, while one relatum in each correspondence relation is always a fact (or state of affairs), it is not the case that one relatum in each truthmaking relation is always a fact (or state of affairs). Thus the two relations are not identical (2001a: 278). For example, Socrates is a truthmaker for *that Socrates exists*. Socrates is no fact. But for the correspondence theorist, says Lewis, all correspondents are facts. To answer Lewis's objection here, I suggest we simply defer to Marian David's response:

champions of truthmaking might simply concede the point saying that they are not wedded to correspondence with *facts*—correspondence with various bits of reality, including facts but also other things, might be good enough to deserve the name 'correspondence theory'. (2004: 46)

Indeed, the union of 'correspondence' and 'fact' is a twentieth century innovation. For much of philosophical history, truth was taken to be correspondence with (non-factive) objects (see Künne 2003). Lewis's argument relies on a needlessly narrow understanding of what correspondence theories are.

Lewis's argument for the stronger conclusion that truthmaker theory offers no theory of truth at all is more involved. Lewis first grants that deflationary theories of truth (e.g.,

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<sup>23</sup>In an earlier paper, McGrath seems to recognize (I think correctly) that truthmaker theorists are interested in accounting for truths themselves, and not that in which the *truth* of some truth consists (1997: 88-89).

Quine 1970, Horwich 1990, and Field 1994a) are genuine theories of truth. Such theories admit the legitimacy of all instances<sup>24</sup> of some version or other of the truth schema, and further claim that the sum of the instances (more or less) is all the theory of truth that there is. For example, Paul Horwich recognizes the propositional version of the T-schema, and thinks that our *a priori* acceptance of it and its instances exhausts our understanding of truth:<sup>25</sup>

(T<sub>2</sub>) The proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*.

Hartry Field and Quine prefer to work with sentences:

(T<sub>3</sub>) '*p*' is true if and only if *p*.

Other theories of truth (Lewis calls them “grand theories of truth”) must be consistent with the instances of T<sub>2</sub> and T<sub>3</sub>, and offer in addition some further schema

(X) '*p*' is true if and only if '*p*' satisfies X

where ‘satisfies X’ is filled in with the appropriate analysis. Hence:

(X<sub>1</sub>) '*p*' is true if and only if '*p*' corresponds with the facts.

(X<sub>2</sub>) '*p*' is true if and only if '*p*' coheres in the best belief system.

(X<sub>3</sub>) '*p*' is true if and only if '*p*' is useful to believe.

(X<sub>4</sub>) '*p*' is true if and only if '*p*' satisfies some special epistemic condition.

(X<sub>5</sub>) '*p*' is true if and only if '*p*' has a truthmaker.

Combining one of the grand schemas with the initial truth schema, we end up with a series of axioms, such as ‘Kermit is green if and only if ‘Kermit is green’ has some truthmaker’ and ‘Orville likes popcorn if and only if ‘Orville likes popcorn’ has some truthmaker’. Faced with such axioms, Lewis concludes: “the deflationary conception and the grand theory coexist peacefully. But by taking them together, we find that the grand theory was not after

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<sup>24</sup>All non-pathological instances, in the case of Horwich (1990).

<sup>25</sup>Almost. Horwich later adds to his deflationary account the axiom that only propositions are true (1998: 43).

all a theory about *truth*. It was a theory of many things” (2001b: 603). Here, we see that the “truthmaker theory of truth” given by  $X_5$  is actually a theory about Kermit and Orville, greenness and popcorn, and so forth. What the axioms of the truthmaker theory do not make use of is the notion of truth. So Lewis is suggesting that our traditional theories of truth are none of them theories of truth, for, when combined with one of the truth schemas, they yield axioms that are not at all about truth. In particular, one cannot use  $X_5$  to give a truthmaker theory of truth.

Lewis seems to be of two minds regarding what he has written on theories of truth. As just cited, his 2001b describes *all* the usual theories of truth as not being theories of truth after all. Yet in his 2001a, he wields his idea differentially to dismiss *only* correspondence and truthmaker theories as not being theories of truth. The other grand theories are let off the hook; it is just supposed, contra his own 2001b, that they are legitimate theories of truth. Lewis’s ambivalence here suggests that his argument for why certain theories fail to qualify as theories of truth is fatally flawed, and that we should not use it to resolve our question of whether truthmaker theory can offer a theory of truth. Recall that Lewis thinks that when we combine the truth schema with one of the grand theory schemas, we end up with an infinity of axioms, none of which are about truth.<sup>26</sup> Lewis concludes that such theories “are theories of many things,” and hence that “the mention of truth is just an abbreviatory device” (2001b: 604).<sup>27</sup> But notice that, by employing his technique, it becomes impossible to offer a theory

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<sup>26</sup>Actually, at least some of the axioms will involve truth, namely, those axioms that involve sentences which use ‘truth’. One such axiom is: ‘Pilate asked after the nature of truth’ is true if and only if Pilate asked after the nature of truth.

<sup>27</sup>Lewis’s point here, when applied to truthmaking, was made explicit much earlier, by both John Fox (1987: 189) and Bigelow (1988: 125-127). Both writers acknowledge the point that Lewis is making—that ‘true’ is playing an abbreviatory role in the statements of truthmaker theory—and for all that they happily persist in thinking of truthmaker theory, now *contra* Lewis, as an articulation of the correspondence theory of truth.

of truth. As Marian David points out, Lewis’s argument form even reveals the deflationary theory of truth not to be a theory of truth (2004: 46). From **T<sub>3</sub>** and its instances we get:

(**O**) ‘Orville likes popcorn’ is true if and only if Orville likes popcorn.

Combining **O** with the truth schema (**T<sub>3</sub>**) we can derive:

(**O'**) Orville likes popcorn if and only if Orville likes popcorn.

All the axioms of the deflationary theory of truth, when combined with the truth schema, yield axioms like **O'**, none of which<sup>28</sup> concerns truth. Since the deflationary theory of truth, like all the grand theories of truth, is nothing but “a bundle of claims that are not at all about truth, it should not be called a ‘theory of truth’” (Lewis 2001a: 279). Moreover, *any* possible future theory we might offer in attempts to elucidate the nature of truth would fall victim to Lewis’s argument, supposing only minimally that any such future theory is consistent with the T-sentences. For any time we offer an analysis of what it is for a sentence (proposition, belief, statement, or what have you) to be true, the truth schema will lie in waiting, able to transform our intended theory of truth into a theory of everything else besides.<sup>29</sup>

We have two options. First, we could use the argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* against Lewis’s account of what a theory of truth is, for what would a theory of truth be if none of the classical contenders qualify? Any theory of truth that satisfies Tarski’s adequacy condition of entailing the T-sentences will fall prey to Lewis’s argument. So any minimally successful theory of truth will not count as a theory of truth! Or we might take the conclusion

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Wolfgang Künnle seems to side with Lewis on the issue (2003: 164). I do as well, but for my own reasons that will be discussed below.

<sup>28</sup>But recall footnote 26.

<sup>29</sup>Lewis’s argument seems fatally flawed in a number of ways. The form of the argument is as follows. He shows how a theory T committed to theses A and B entails C. A and B, by the way, make use of X. But C is not about X. Therefore, because C is not about X, T is not about X. But wait—T still includes A and B, and A and B are about X! A and B don’t disappear from the theory simply because they imply something else.

seriously, and use it to motivate an idea that some deflationists have long advocated, that there simply is no theory to be had of truth. Philosophers have been laboring in error when they have proclaimed there to be a substantive project known as “the theory of truth”.

Consider what Ayer had to say on the subject: “there is no problem of truth as it is ordinarily conceived” (1952: 89). Still, mainstream deflationists like Horwich or Field are not out to deny that *their own* minimalist theories are theories of truth. They offer, after all, deflationary theories of truth. Myself, I am happy to accept both options. Lewis’s argumentative strategy is dialectically flawed (even by its own lights, as David 2004 expertly shows). Nonetheless, he has highlighted, even if inadvertently, what I take to be an important deflationary insight, namely, that the theory of truth, in whatever form, is really a theory of everything: a theory about *truths*. And truths cover all. So theories of truth are indeed about everything (at least from this deflationary perspective), but we should not thereby disqualify them from being theories of truth. Theories of truth *are* about everything!

For the reasons we have now seen, Lewis’s argument to the effect that truthmaker theory does not offer a theory of truth fails.<sup>30</sup> Finally, we may consider Merricks’s argument for the same conclusion. Merricks agrees with Lewis that not only is truthmaker theory not a correspondence theory, it is not a theory of truth at all. Merricks thinks that theories of truth must offer an analysis of ‘being true’. Truthmaker theory offers no such analysis. Therefore, truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth. Here is Merricks:

Truthmaker [i.e., truthmaker maximalism] says that every claim has ontological commitments of a certain sort. And Truthmaker catches cheaters who fail to meet those ontological commitments. But none of these claims about ontological commitment amount to—or even look remotely like—a theory of the nature of truth

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<sup>30</sup>See also the rest of David 2004 and Vision 2004 for more reasons why Lewis’s argument is dissatisfactory.

[...] Because Truthmaker offers no analysis of *being true*, Truthmaker is not the correspondence theory of truth. (2007: 15)<sup>31</sup>

Not only is truthmaker theory not a correspondence theory, it is not a theory of truth at all, for it fails to analyze ‘being true’. The truthmaker theorist thinks that a sentence (or proposition or what have you) is true in virtue of the existence of something that makes it true. But, Merricks thinks, the truthmaker theorist’s idea does not offer an analysis of what it is to be true. It gives, we might say, an ontological requirement for something to be true. But it does not unpack what ‘being true’ is.

The fundamental flaw with Merricks’s argument is simply that it imposes too strong a requirement on the theory of truth. In effect, he requires, *contra* Lewis 1983, that all accounts be analyses. Defenders of primitivist conceptions of truth reject such a requirement; they hold that truth is not something that can be further analyzed. It belongs to our stock of primitives—it is something we use to understand other less fundamental notions. Those who take truth to be one of our primitive notions do not thereby hold no theory of truth; quite to the contrary, they hold a *primitivist* theory of truth. Merricks himself even advocates a primitivist theory (2007: 181-187). So while I agree with Merricks that truthmaker theory offers no theory of truth, I do not endorse his argument. Furthermore, it is open to an objector to suggest that even if Merricks doesn’t see truthmaking put to good use as a theory of truth, one might nevertheless try to put truthmaking to work in such a capacity. However, such a project cannot succeed: truthmaker theory cannot be put to work as elucidating the nature of truth. Instead, truthmaker theory presupposes an antecedent notion of truth, as I shall now argue.

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<sup>31</sup>For similar comments, see Horwich 2008 and Mellor 2009.

### 2.3. Truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth

We have now seen several flawed reasons for advocating a separation of labor between truth and truthmaking. Merricks's reasoning, however, was close to the truth. Truthmaker theorists, we argue, are best understood as *not* offering an analysis of truth. Still, certain truthmaker theorists disagree with Merricks and me here, and respond that they do indeed intend the notion of having a truthmaker to be giving an analysis of what it is to be true.<sup>32</sup> As with  $X_5$  above, to be true just is to have a truthmaker. This route, however, is unavailable to the truthmaker theorist. The reason is quite simple: the truthmaking relation itself must be defined in terms of truth. So truthmaking already presupposes the notion of truth; to rely on truthmaking to offer an analysis of truth would be to admit a viciously circular analysis.<sup>33</sup> Turning back to the last chapter, one can notice that all of the accounts of the truthmaking relation given there employ either 'is true' or 'truth'. Further, any other account of the truthmaking relation is going to involve truth, for it must account for the *truth* of truth-bearers, and not their other features. Accordingly, truthmaker theory cannot offer an analysis of truth, for it must already presuppose one.<sup>34</sup>

To see why truthmaker theory itself is not in the business of offering a theory of truth, consider first that truthmaker maximalism—the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker—would have to be not only true but a necessary part of truthmaker theory itself if truthmaker theory were to offer a theory of truth. If truth consists (at least in part) in having a truthmaker,

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<sup>32</sup>See again all those authors cited in section 2.1.

<sup>33</sup>Merricks himself also makes this point (2007: 15), but doesn't explore it as deeply as I am about to. Cf. David 2009: 144 and Schulte Forthcoming: 8.

<sup>34</sup>Armstrong also recognizes this fact, and as a result refrains from calling his "theory of the nature of truth" a *definition* of truth (2004: 17). Instead, he thinks his truthmaker principle offers necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be true. Armstrong goes on to express sympathy with (something like) a primitive conception of truth.

then every truth would have to have a truthmaker.<sup>35</sup> Otherwise there would be truths whose truth could not be accounted for by truthmaking. But maximalism is not a *sine qua non* of truthmaker theory, and so truthmaker theory by itself offers no theory of truth.<sup>36</sup>

As we have already seen, many truthmaker theorists reject maximalism (e.g., Bigelow 1988 and Lewis 2001b), though of course the matter is controversial. The paradigm counterexamples of *truthmaker gaps*—truths without truthmakers—are negative existentials. It is true that there are no hobbits, but perhaps it need not follow that there exists something making it true that there are no hobbits. To think otherwise is to suppose that one must ground one’s “atheism” (about hobbits) with a separate kind of “theism” (about, say, negative facts, absences, or totalities)<sup>37</sup>. Regardless of whether this stance is the correct response to the problem of negative existentials, it is a defensible one, and one available to truthmaker theorists. Since one may be a truthmaker theorist without being a maximalist, truthmaker theorists *qua* truthmaker theorists are not in the business of offering a theory of truth.

Now, some philosophers think that in abandoning maximalism, we abandon truthmaker theory altogether.<sup>38</sup> On such a view, there simply is no room in truthmaker theory for non-maximalism. George Molnar writes that admitting that some truths do not have truthmakers is “the way of ontological frivolousness. It is a truly desperate resort” (2000: 85). But this response is too quick. The foundational idea underlying truthmaker theory is that truth depends upon reality. Truths are true in virtue of the way the world is. Negative

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. Smith and Simon 2007.

<sup>36</sup>Armstrong even claims that “most” truthmaker theorists reject maximalism, though he thinks they incur a substantial theoretical debt by doing so (2006: 245).

<sup>37</sup>See, respectively, Russell 1985, Martin 1996, and Armstrong 2004.

<sup>38</sup>See, for instance, Cameron 2008a: 412.

existentials do depend upon the way of the world for their truth—they depend on there not being any of the relevant things around. The case is very different for the suspicious phenomenalist and behaviorist counterfactuals that motivated contemporary truthmaker theory in the first place.<sup>39</sup> Here philosophers were positing truths that depended in no way upon the world for their truth.<sup>40</sup> But such counterfactuals are nothing like the negative truths involving hobbits or Arctic penguins. The latter are still true in virtue of the way of the world, even if no particular entities exist that necessitate those truths. The truth that there are no Arctic penguins admits of a perfectly worldly explanation; its truth is no metaphysical mystery. Not all truthmaker gaps, then, are alike. Some are offensive to the spirit of truthmaking; others are not.<sup>41</sup> So there are good reasons for rejecting truthmaker maximalism that are not reasons for rejecting truthmaker theory itself. Since rejecting maximalism is no automatic offense to truthmaker theory, it follows that truthmaker theory is not in the business of giving a theory of truth.

Putting truthmaking to work as a theory of truth requires a commitment to maximalism. But not even maximalists can employ truthmaking in order to adequately say what truth is, for the truthmaking relation itself must be defined in terms of truth, and so any such analysis is circular. As we have seen, all of the accounts in the literature regarding the nature of the truthmaking relation (including the one for which I have argued) employ an antecedent notion of truth. For most, truthmaking is (at least) a matter of necessitation:  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  only if it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is *true*. Hence, the necessitation condition already employs the notion of truth. The other approaches share

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<sup>39</sup>See Armstrong 2004: 1-3.

<sup>40</sup>A recent defense of truthmaker-less counterfactuals can be found in Lange 2009, which employs them in defending an account of the laws of nature.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Lewis 1992: 218-219.

this same feature. Any yet-to-be-defended account of the truthmaking relation is going to have to involve truth, for it must account for the *truth* of truth-bearers, and not their other features. On pain of circularity, anyone trying to build a theory of truth from a theory of truthmaking must somehow dispense with truth from the notion of truthmaking.

Perhaps the advocates of a “truthmaker theory of truth” might respond by accepting the circularity point, but persisting in thinking that their theories still constitute a kind of correspondence theory. Such a theorist might simply identify the truthmaking relation with the correspondence relation, and identify the class of truthmakers as the class of corresponding objects (which may or may not be limited to facts or states of affairs, if such things are included at all). Here we have a many-many correspondence relation, and a class of correspondents that need not be limited solely to facts; perhaps this is what Oliver has in mind by a “sanitised” correspondence theory. Indeed, Armstrong sometimes thinks of his truthmaker theory in just these terms (1997: 128). Can truthmaker theorists of this sort think of their theory as being a kind of correspondence theory? Such theorists can call their view whatever they want, but must realize that their “correspondence theory” is not in fact a theory of truth, if such theories aim to be non-circular analyses of the property of truth (as are all the traditional theories of truth).<sup>42</sup> The circularity worry is avoided, in other words, only if we accept that the new “correspondence theory” on offer is not actually a theory of *truth*. For as we have seen, the truthmaking relation presupposes the notion of truth, and so any correspondence relation that is itself the truthmaking relation already presupposes the notion of truth. I have been assuming that correspondence theories of truth do aim to reveal the nature of truth in this way. If correspondence theory just is truthmaker theory, so be it. But

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<sup>42</sup>Of course, many things might be meant by ‘theory of truth’, and I have no interest in arguing that truthmaker theory cannot offer a theory of truth in *any* sense whatsoever. Nevertheless, what I mean by an adequate theory of truth fits well with the ambitions of the traditional contenders.

then we should not think of correspondence theories as being theories of truth in the traditional sense.

It might also be thought that the appearance of truth in the above accounts is innocuous, and that it can be dispensed with by utilizing a familiar maneuver from the deflationist's toolkit. For deflationary theories of truth, 'true' is primarily a logical device useful for expressing generalizations (among other things), and is not used to predicate a substantive property that admits of further metaphysical analysis (as correspondence and coherentist accounts hold). For instance, instead of reasserting each and every individual thing that Kant ever wrote, I can simply say that everything that Kant wrote is true.

Substantive theorists of truth can acknowledge such logical features of the truth predicate, so long as they reject the thesis distinctive to deflationism that such logical features *exhaust* all there is to be said about truth. So we might hold that we can give an account of the truthmaking relation that relies on 'true' only as a device for generalization,<sup>43</sup> and that hence can emerge truth-free.

This deflationist-inspired response, however, is not available to those who seek to use their truthmaker theory for revealing the nature of truth.<sup>44</sup> For expository purposes, let us stick with the necessitation condition on truthmaking:

- (N) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  only if it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true.

Equipped with **N**, we may use it in giving a necessary condition for our truthmaking account of truth:

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<sup>43</sup>For the generalizing role of 'true' in truthmaker theory, see Fox 1987: 189, Bigelow 1988: 125-127, Lewis 2001a: 278 and 2001b: 603-604, and Künne 2003: 164.

<sup>44</sup> It is a perfectly fine response for those who are *deflationists* about truth and want to understand the axioms of truthmaker theory, as I discuss below.

(**TT**<sub>1</sub>) For all  $y$ ,  $y$  is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true.

Noticing the way that ‘is true’ is redundant, we may turn **TT**<sub>1</sub> into:

(**TT**<sub>2</sub>) For all  $y$ ,  $y$  is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$ .

**TT**<sub>2</sub> avoids **TT**<sub>1</sub>’s use of ‘true’, but at the cost of unintelligibility. The quantifier accompanying ‘ $x$ ’ is the ordinary objectual quantifier. If we also quantify over ‘ $y$ ’ objectually—substituting it with truth-bearers like sentences, beliefs, and propositions—then the final substitution will fail. We would have the following bit of nonsense as an instance:

(1) ‘Bill will kill Jill’ is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then ‘Bill will kill Jill’.

What we need at the end of the instance is a used sentence, not a mentioned one. For example:

(2) ‘Bill will kill Jill’ is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then Bill will kill Jill.

In order to derive axioms like **2**, we need to transform **TT**<sub>2</sub> into:

(**TT**<sub>3</sub>) For all  $y$ , ‘ $y$ ’ is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$ .<sup>45</sup>

To interpret **TT**<sub>3</sub>, we need to employ both objectual quantification (for ‘ $x$ ’) and substitutional quantification, for ‘ $y$ ’ is now varying over sentential expressions. (Otherwise we would be unintelligibly quantifying objects into quotes.)

There is a serious problem, however, with resorting to substitutional quantification here: the traditional semantics given for the substitutional quantifiers already employs the notion of truth. As Horwich notes: “the notion of substitutional quantification is trivially interdefinable with that of truth and itself requires theoretical elucidation” (1990: 27; see also Kripke 1976). A particular substitutionally quantified sentence ‘ $\Sigma x(\dots x\dots)$ ’ is true if and only

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<sup>45</sup>**TT**<sub>3</sub> is built for sentences. We could replace the ‘ $y$ ’ with ‘the proposition that  $y$ ’ for a propositional version, or ‘the belief that  $y$ ’ for a belief version. The problem persists despite what we take truth-bearers to be.

if there is an expression (from the relevant substitution class) such that substituting it for ‘ $x$ ’ in ‘... $x$ ...’ yields a *true* sentence. A universally substitutionally quantified sentence ‘ $\forall x(\dots x\dots)$ ’ is true if and only if every expression (from the relevant substitution class) is such that substituting it for ‘ $x$ ’ in ‘... $x$ ...’ yields a *true* sentence. Employing substitutional quantification to define the truthmaking relation still leaves us with an explicitly circular definition of truth.<sup>46</sup> Thus, in order to rely on something like **TT**<sub>3</sub> to offer a truth-free truthmaker theory of truth, we have to formulate an account of substitutional quantification that in turn does not rely on the notion of truth.<sup>47, 48</sup>

Perhaps the answer for the truthmaker theorist seeking to analyze truth in terms of truthmaking lies not in substitutional quantification, but in infinite lists. Horwich (1990) thinks that truth cannot be defined finitely because he rejects as circular any substitutionally quantified truth schema. Truth is defined instead by the T-sentences, the infinitely many non-paradoxical instances of the propositional truth schema: the proposition that  $p$  is true if and only if  $p$ . Perhaps we can do the same for **TT**<sub>1</sub>. Even if we cannot adequately remove ‘is true’

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<sup>46</sup>It has been pointed out to me by an anonymous referee for a related paper that defining truth in terms of objectual quantification, or even any logical connective for that matter, will also result in circularity as these notions may also need to be defined in terms of truth. If so, then there is no special problem with substitutional quantification. If these other logical notions are also defined in terms of truth, then so much the worse for *anyone* trying to define truth, including truthmaker theorists. I take this to be a strong argument in favor of primitivism.

<sup>47</sup>Christopher Hill (2002) has attempted such a project in his recent work (though his interests are disconnected from truthmaking). His aim is to offer an inferentialist treatment of substitutional quantification. This is not the place to evaluate Hill’s proposal in full (see Simmons 2006 for more criticism), but I have some initial doubts. One may well wonder whether the notion of inference will admit of a full elucidation without somehow relying on truth. It seems like inference is just another notion that we can make better sense of if we have a notion of truth already in hand. Regardless of the success of a project like Hill’s, truthmaker theorists who want their theory to serve double duty as a theory of truth have a steep hill to climb here (no pun intended).

<sup>48</sup>One might respond by rejecting the semantics for the substitutional quantifiers given here, and taking them instead as logical primitives. (Thanks to Thomas Hofweber and Jody Azzouni for pointing out this response.) This maneuver does indeed sidestep the circularity worry, but invokes a theoretical primitive that requires some further theoretical justification. It’s unclear what could motivate taking on this additional primitive, given that the advocate of **TT**<sub>3</sub> doesn’t get to say anything above and beyond what a deflationist who accepts truthmaker theory can say.

from **TT**<sub>1</sub>, we can take its instances, pair them with the T-sentences, and derive both **2** and the following:

- (3) ‘Jill will kill Bill’ is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then Jill will kill Bill.
- (4) ‘Jill will thrill Bill’ is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then Jill will thrill Bill.

Here we have some of the needed non-circular axioms of our truthmaker theory of truth. One could point to **2**, **3**, **4**, and countless others and suggest that they are the key to understanding the nature of truth, just as Horwich points to the list of T-sentences and says that they are the key to understanding the nature of truth. Call this view ‘**TT**<sub>4</sub>’.

**TT**<sub>4</sub> faces three major difficulties. First, anyone who advocates such a view relinquishes the ability to give a finitely stateable theory of truth, a common desideratum for non-deflationary theories of truth.<sup>49</sup> By “going infinite”, a view concedes that nothing *in general* can be said about a particular notion—truth may be defined only implicitly, not explicitly. Such an attitude is appropriate for deflationary views of truth that deny that there is anything in common between truths.<sup>50</sup> Substantive theories of truth, however, do hold that there are important commonalities between truths, and thus the absence of an explicit, general statement of what it is in which truth consists is a serious shortcoming.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>See David 1994: 107-110.

<sup>50</sup>Which is not to say that all deflationists are happy with the infinite approach. See Hill 2002 and Künne 2003.

<sup>51</sup>There is another closely related worry about pairing a substantive theory of truth with the infinite list approach. If truth is defined by or in conjunction with an infinity of T-sentences, then truth appears to be defined in terms of all the many notions that appear in those T-sentences. This led Anil Gupta to charge that, according to infinitary deflationists, “an understanding of ‘true’ requires the possession of massive conceptual resources” (1993: 69). In short, you don’t understand truth unless you understand *everything*. Deflationists may well find something right in this conclusion: you don’t understand the truth of ‘Electrons are negatively charged’ unless you understand what electrons and negative charge are, for the *truth* of ‘Electrons are negatively charged’ consists in nothing more than the negative charge of electrons. Substantivists about truth say that its truth consists in something else (something that is common to all and only truths), like *correspondence with the facts* or *coherence in an ideal system* or *warranted assertibility*. So the thought that truth has to be defined in terms of

Secondly, **T<sub>4</sub>** exhibits a sort of motivational schizophrenia. Anyone who takes **2**, **3**, **4**, and their cousins to constitute a theory of *truth* is advocating a union between anti-deflationist attitudes about truth (that it has an underlying nature, to be given by truthmaking) with deflationary maneuvers for dispensing with truth. It is deflationists who avail themselves of infinite lists, not those who think that the nature of truth can be analyzed into further, more basic notions. The tension between these competing attitudes can best be appreciated by noting how this view treats the two instances of ‘true’ appearing in **TT<sub>1</sub>** very differently. The first appearance of ‘true’ presents truth as something in need of further analysis—something that is to be more fully explained by whatever follows the conditional. But the second appearance of ‘true’ is treated as a mere logical device that is in principle dispensable.

Finally, **TT<sub>4</sub>** requires a problematic relationship to the T-sentences. We arrive at **2**, **3**, and **4** by deriving them from the circular instances of **TT<sub>1</sub>** and the T-sentences. For example, we can pair the following instance of **TT<sub>1</sub>**

‘Bill will kill Jill’ is true only if there exists some  $x$  such that it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then ‘Bill will kill Jill’ is true.

with the T-sentence

‘Bill will kill Jill’ is true if and only Bill will kill Jill

in order to derive **2**. To arrive at **TT<sub>4</sub>**, then, we need to employ the T-sentences. Now, **TT<sub>4</sub>** cannot take the T-sentences to be the explanatorily basic facts about truth—that would be to

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*everything* does not sit well with substantive theories of truth. (The reference to understanding here is dispensable. Even if truth consists in something that is not immediately accessible to our understanding—as water’s chemical composition need not be available to someone who can deploy the water concept—no substantivist should be happy reducing the property of truth to everything that appears in a T-sentence, i.e., everything whatsoever. Truth would turn out to be the most complicated property imaginable.) To connect this thought with **TT<sub>4</sub>**, defining truth in terms of truthmaking, but then defining the latter in terms of everything in this infinitary way is of no help to the substantivist about truth, and offers no advance in our understanding of truth beyond standard deflationism.

concede deflationism—but neither can the advocate of  $\mathbf{TT}_4$  take them to be explained by  $\mathbf{TT}_4$ , for that would involve an explanatory circularity. Moreover, most theorists of truth acknowledge what Tarski calls “Convention T”, which holds that any adequate theory of truth must entail all the T-sentences (1956: 187-188). The idea is that the T-sentences provide a sort of “check” on a theory of truth; any theory of truth that fails to produce the T-sentences is thereby defective as an account of truth.  $\mathbf{TT}_4$ ’s relationship to the T-sentences, however, compromises the purpose of Convention T.  $\mathbf{TT}_4$  must be front-loaded with the T-sentences in order to derive its axioms, and so the convention provides no meaningful constraint on it.  $\mathbf{TT}_4$  trivially satisfies the constraint by taking all the T-sentences for granted. One might expect this result from deflationism, which takes the theory of truth to be exhausted by the T-sentences. But non-deflationary theorists of truth typically hold that their theories need to be derived independently of the T-sentences, lest they end up using truth to say what truth is.  $\mathbf{TT}_4$  is unique among theories of truth in virtue of its awkwardly taking the T-sentences for granted without taking them to be the explanatorily fundamental facts about truth.

The proper way to understand **2**, **3**, **4**, and their cousins is not to think of them as revealing the nature of truth, of what the shared essence is between all and only truths. If any infinite list of axioms is to reveal the nature of truth, it’s the list of T-sentences. What **2**, **3**, and **4** are, however, are axioms of how a deflationist unhappy with substitutional quantification should understand *truthmaker maximalism*. Because such axioms are available, the cogency of truthmaker maximalism is no immediate threat to deflationism. Deflationism about truth and truthmaker maximalism are perfectly consistent doctrines.<sup>52</sup> What we do not

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<sup>52</sup>For more on this compatibility see section 3.2.

have here is a treatment of the nature of *truth* itself, of what feature it is that is shared between all and only truths. The deflationary tactics we have employed show that deflationists may accept truthmaker maximalism; what the tactics should not be used for is revealing any underlying essence to the nature of truth in terms of truthmakers.

#### 2.4. Truthmaking against correspondence

We have now seen why truthmaker theory does not and cannot offer a theory of truth.<sup>53</sup> *A fortiori*, then, truthmaker theory does not and cannot offer a correspondence theory of truth. Yet someone might protest here that something has gone terribly wrong. Truthmaker theory just is a kind of correspondence theory, goes the objection. Anyone who thinks otherwise has misunderstood the project. Now, we began the chapter by explaining why many have seen a theory of truth inside truthmaking. We may now harness those similarities, and use them to undermine correspondence theories. What I shall now argue for is the claim that truthmaker theory, precisely because of its similarity to correspondence theories, actually serves to undermine the need for adopting any correspondence theory of truth. Truthmaker theory captures the theoretical motivations that underlie correspondence theories and make them seem so natural. But truthmaker theory can satisfy those motivations at lesser theoretical cost. Hence, those who are attracted to correspondence theories should become truthmaker theorists (and reject correspondence theories of truth).

It is a truism nowadays that some version or other of a correspondence theory of truth is taken to be the default, natural, or pre-theoretical understanding of truth. Here is Richard Cartwright: “I think we are all inclined toward some form of “correspondence” theory of truth” (1987: 73). Accordingly, opponents of correspondence agree that they need to show

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<sup>53</sup>By ‘adequate’ here I mean non-circular and finitely stateable.

either why the default understanding is misguided, or why they also are entitled to the language and notion of correspondence. Richard Rorty (1986) would argue that the very notion of correspondence naively presupposes an untenably strong form of representationalist realism, whereas Horwich (1990) would argue that deflationists have sufficient resources to claim (without compromising their deflationism) that truths correspond to reality.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, then, of what views philosophers of truth ultimately settle on, everyone seems to agree that we must start with correspondence theories, for there at least seems to be something right about them. Unfortunately, many writers are not terribly explicit about what it is about correspondence that seems so natural—it's just taken to be obvious that correspondence is the natural way to think about truth. Let us see if we can't tease out the real motivations behind correspondence.

First, it seems clear in the literature that many writers, regardless of their views on truth, simply take it as a datum that truths correspond with the facts (or, more broadly, with reality). What we have here is a platitude that any theory of truth must uphold, even if not with the substance originally intended. Enemies of correspondence such as Simon Blackburn (1984b: 224), Horwich (1990: 110-125), Dorothy Grover (1992: 32), Crispin Wright (1992), and Hill (2002) all agree that it is platitudinous that truths correspond to reality. So while it is true that truths correspond with reality, such a claim is not indicative of anything substantial, or something that should compel us to adopt a more robust understanding of truth. In some cases, 'corresponds with reality' is simply taken to be synonymous with or just a roundabout way of saying 'is true' (Ramsey 1927: 158, Blackburn 1984: 225).<sup>55</sup> Still, one potential

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<sup>54</sup>Young 2009 adamantly disagrees.

<sup>55</sup>Here is Cousin 1950: "the correspondence theory of truth, though convenient and (non-committally speaking) undoubtedly correct, is something of a fraud. For whereas it seems to enlighten us by pointing to some relation

motivation for adopting a substantive correspondence theory is that doing so guarantees that we preserve the platitudinous connection between truth and reality. Our opponents of correspondence would say that doing so is overkill, and that we can preserve the connection without adopting a metaphysically substantive theory of truth (a sentiment to which I shall agree in the end). What I do not agree with, however, is that Tarski's T-sentences (or deflationary accounts that rely on them alone) all by themselves satisfy correspondence inclinations, as Quine expressed when he wrote that disquotationalism alone is "the valid residue of the correspondence theory of truth" (1990: 93).<sup>56</sup> To preserve correspondence, I shall argue, we need something more than deflationism, but something less than a correspondence theory. One can imagine just what sort of theory I think is called for. As we shall see, it is *truthmaker theory* that is the valid residue of the correspondence theory of truth.

Advocates of correspondence may fire back by saying that although their deflationary opponents might be able to show that they too may employ the language of correspondence, they fail to preserve any of the important, intended substance behind the platitude that truths correspond to reality. Wright nicely presents that sentiment on behalf of the irritated correspondence theorist:

while the minimalist can perhaps use such manipulations to entitle himself to the *phrase* "represents the facts", or "corresponds to reality", as a permissible gloss on "is true", he does not thereby earn the intended substance. This intended substance is [...] the idea that, crudely, talk of "representation of the facts" is not just admissible

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which one articulated structure (the proposition) bears to another (the fact), it long ago turned out to be, if so understood, impossibly vague. And this is because, if I am right, it never was more than a vague formula giving a sort of schema or rule for the construction of explanations of T-statements" (168).

<sup>56</sup>See also Karl Popper, who thinks that the T-sentences vindicate not only correspondence intuitions, but the correspondence theory itself (1963: 223-228). (Putnam claims that Popper here "simply doesn't know what he is talking about" (1985: 72).) Tarski himself at times seems to endorse this view (1956: 153), and at other times reject it (1944: 342-343). Alan Musgrave thinks that Tarski's semantic conception of truth provides all the correspondence we could ever want (1989: 387; Levin 1984 agrees). See also Searle 1995, chapter 9.

phrasing, a harmless gloss on talk of truth, but incorporates a philosophically correct—as we might say, *seriously dyadic*—perspective on the truth predicate (at least for discourses where realism is appropriate). (1992: 83)

When correspondence theorists claim that truths are true in virtue of their corresponding with reality, they do not take themselves to be uttering a tautology—that truths are true in virtue of being true.<sup>57</sup> The notion of correspondence is taken to be an elucidation or analysis of that in which truth consists—or perhaps of what it is that truth depends upon—and not a mere rephrasing. Wright suggests that the principal idea behind correspondence is that truth is dyadic. The motivation can't be merely that truth is dyadic, for other theories of truth (e.g., coherence) also take truth to be a relational notion. Rather, it is important to the correspondence theorist that truth signals a particular kind of dyadic relation, one obtaining between something linguistic and something worldly. In short, correspondence theorists insist that we must not leave the world out of our account of truth.<sup>58</sup>

Hence, there is broad consensus among theorists of truth that there is something to the notion of correspondence that needs to be preserved, whether it is a platitude (Blackburn, Wright) or intuition (Grover, Horwich, Hill).<sup>59</sup> Not unrelated, I think, to our correspondence platitude is a second motivation for correspondence theories. Correspondence theories have long been taken to be the essence of some form of metaphysical realism, or at least a powerful weapon in opposing anti-realism of various stripes. In the early twentieth century,

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<sup>57</sup>Rather than being tautologous, the idea that truths are true in virtue of being true may well be incoherent, or otherwise deeply metaphysically problematic. As Schaffer (2010) makes clear, he thinks that the 'in virtue of' relation is the asymmetric notion of grounding. Something cannot be grounded in itself, or depend upon itself. The idea of truth depending upon itself (rather than upon something more fundamental) is deeply disturbing to truthmaker theorists.

<sup>58</sup>Consider also this passage from Wright: "In general, we'd want to think both that there's a real distinction marked by the classification of some propositions as true and others as false, and that it is a distinction which cannot generally be understood without reference to things which are not themselves propositions, and so cannot be understood in intrinsicist or coherentist terms" (1999: 37).

<sup>59</sup>For more on the "correspondence intuition", see Putnam 1983, Searle 1998, Künne 2003: 149, and Douven and Hindriks 2005.

realists (most prominently Russell and G. E. Moore) sided with correspondence; idealists (e.g., Harold Joachim (1906) and F. H. Bradley (1907)) took to coherence.<sup>60</sup> Later on, more modern anti-realists (in the vein of Michael Dummett and certain time-slices of Hilary Putnam) gravitated toward epistemic or pragmatic theories of truth. Now, I shall argue later on for neutrality between positions regarding realism and positions regarding truth. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand why many have taken correspondence to be a natural ally of realism. To the extent, then, that realism (whatever it is) seems compelling, correspondence, too, will appear compelling and well motivated. Consider this passage from Dummett's seminal paper on truth:

the correspondence theory expresses one important feature of the concept of truth which is not expressed by the law "It is true that p if and only if p" and which we have so far left quite out of account: that a statement is true only if there is something in the world *in virtue of which* it is true. Although we no longer accept the correspondence theory, we remain realists *au fond*; we retain in our thinking a fundamentally realist conception of truth. Realism consists in the belief that for any statement there must be something in virtue of which either it or its negation is true [...]. (1958-1959: 157)

Let me make a few observations about this particularly pregnant passage. First, notice how Dummett thinks that the axioms of a deflationary definition of truth (e.g., 'It is true that snow is white if and only if snow is white') are not enough to establish correspondence or satisfy realist inclinations. The T-sentences make no explicit mention of the world, which is exactly the complaint of the correspondence theorist we canvassed earlier. Next, notice how quickly Dummett moves from the correspondence theory of truth to realism. He obviously thinks that the two stand or fall together (he of course thinks the latter). It is particularly interesting that Dummett describes the correspondence theory not as the view that truths must correspond to some fact or other, but rather as the view that truths are true in virtue of something that exists

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<sup>60</sup>But see Candlish 1989, according to which Bradley is frequently but mistakenly taken to be a coherence theorist. Candlish blames Russell (1989: 334).

in the world. It would be anachronistic to attribute contemporary thoughts of truthmaking to Dummett here, though it is notable that he uses the very language that truthmaker theorists currently adopt. Finally, notice that Dummett here does *not* identify realism simply with bivalence, as Dummett's view is often characterized. Realism about a domain does not consist merely in the statements of that domain all being either true or false; rather, realism is the view that all the statements in the domain are true or false in virtue of something that exists. Realism about a domain seems for Dummett to be something akin to all the statements of a domain or their negations having truthmakers.

If Dummett is correct, then another key motivation for correspondence (which is not altogether distinct from the ones already explored) is that truths are true in virtue of things in the world, that truths are properly grounded in what exists. Such a view is, of course, the very heart of truthmaker theory. But the motivation is still satisfied by traditional correspondence theories, fact-based or object-based. If truths correspond to facts (as is the most common view nowadays), then facts are the objects in virtue of which truths are true. Such a view is taken by Dummett to be very close to realism. Other authors agree (e.g., Blackburn, Arthur Fine, and Putnam).

I agree in spirit with Dummett's diagnosis about the attraction of correspondence. However, I would describe the motivation slightly differently (and so not bias the issue too strongly in favor of truthmaking). I think the core motivation behind correspondence theories of truth is the idea that truths carry ontological and metaphysical commitments.<sup>61</sup> Those commitments are, as Dummett puts it, the objects in virtue of which the truths are true. More

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<sup>61</sup>Cf. Lewis, who notes that "truths are about things, they don't float in a void" (1992: 218).

colloquially, the basic idea is just that truths are *worldly*.<sup>62</sup> Truths are true in virtue of the world. The naturalness behind correspondence cannot be that it is obvious that there must be some metaphysical relation that obtains between two distinct things in order for something to be true. The correspondence “intuition” must be grounded in something more natural than the posits of complicated metaphysical theorizing.<sup>63</sup> Instead, the reason correspondence seems so obviously correct is that we acknowledge that it is the objects in the world that are “responsible” for truths’ being true. It’s the chair in the corner of my bedroom that is responsible for the truth of *that there’s a chair in the corner of my bedroom*. Absent that object, that truth would vanish. The ontological and metaphysical commitments of what we take to be true are not always apparent to us; but that they have them is a basic idea that we can all acknowledge without any effort. What makes non-worldly accounts of truth (such as coherence and pragmatic accounts) so counterintuitive is that they relax the ontological requirements on truth. It is possible for it to be incredibly useful for me to believe that there is a chair in the corner of my bedroom even if there is not one. It is possible that final science may agree. Thus, on some accounts of truth, it could be true that there is a chair in the corner of my bedroom, even though no such chair exists. It is not my aim at the moment to refute such views,<sup>64</sup> rather, we need only see how radical such conclusions are in order to

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<sup>62</sup>By this expression I don’t mean to be pointing out the fact that truth-bearers exist (though of course they do). I mean to be pointing to the fact that truth-bearers are true because *other* things (that usually aren’t truth-bearers) exist. *That snow is white* is true because of the way of the world.

<sup>63</sup>The scare quotes are to mark the fact that the use of the word ‘intuition’ here is not mine, but belongs to the literature. I do not know what an intuition is (I doubt anyone else does, either), and I certainly do not want to jump into the contemporary foray of the role that intuitions play in philosophy. ‘Intuition’ is not one of my words. If any debate in philosophy is more confused than the debate over “realism”, it surely must be the one over “intuitions”.

<sup>64</sup>But let’s do it anyway: Some claim *p* might satisfy some pragmatic account of truth in virtue of the great utility that might be involved in believing *p*. Thus *p* is true. But what *p* says is the case may not obtain, since utility and reality, sadly, do not overlap of necessity. So such a theory holds that it is possible for *p* to be true even though what *p* says is not the case. We have met a *reductio* already (for non-sentential T-sentences are

appreciate why it is perfectly natural to think that truths carry ontological or metaphysical commitments, and to make plausible the idea that such commitments are what supply the correspondence theory its natural plausibility. Truth is worldly, and that's why the theory of truth starts with correspondence theories.<sup>65</sup>

That truth is worldly, that truths carry ontological and metaphysical commitments, is what I propose to be the essence of the correspondence intuition that even deflationists claim to want to uphold. Correspondence theories are attractive because they make explicit the tight connection between what is true and what exists. Notice that if I am correct in my diagnosis, then deflationists are correct that they, too, can maintain the correspondence intuition. For nothing about deflationary theories of truth prevents them from being coupled with some criterion or other of ontological commitment. Simply consider Quine, who upheld both disquotationalism about truth (1970) and his criterion of ontological commitment—that to be is to be the value of a bound variable in a properly regimented theory (1948, 1960). Being a deflationist about truth does not exclude one from holding substantive ontological views about other matters, or engaging in serious metaphysical inquiry.<sup>66</sup> Further, my proposal nicely explains what can seem so bizarre about those like Rorty and Arthur Fine who eschew

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necessarily true), but let's press further. In our case, we are, in effect, simply denying a T-sentence: It's true that there's a chair in the corner of my bedroom even though there isn't a chair in the corner of my bedroom. And T-sentences are true in all possible worlds, at least when we're allowed to hold meanings fixed across them. T-sentences are possibly false only because semantic trickery may be afoot; that is not the case in our example (and only problematic for T-sentences involving sentences), so the pragmatic theory of truth here is false. This argument, of course, is older than us all. See, for instance, Stout 1907 and Russell 1908. There are, of course, formidable replies to such arguments, but for my money these arguments are sound. See also the discussion at section 4.5.

<sup>65</sup>Cf. Strawson: "But one of the merits of the name—'correspondence'—is that it brings out the point that over against judgement and belief is the natural world or reality, the things and events to which our judgements or beliefs relate or which they are *about*; and that it is how things are in the natural world, in reality or in fact, that determines whether our judgements or beliefs are true or false" (1992: 51).

<sup>66</sup>Note also that Quine himself is happy to admit that "No sentence is true but reality makes it so" (1970: 10). One can reject correspondence and maintain that truths are true in virtue of the way the world is. My guess is that Quine would not be pleased with the recent interest in truthmaking, in spite of his own employment of the relevant language. We shall take this topic up further in section 4.2.

correspondence altogether (and don't try to maintain it at all). On my view, the natural thing to say about the truth of *that there are gorillas* is that it is the actual gorillas out in the world that are responsible for that claim's being true. It would be incoherent to think that *that there are gorillas* could be true in spite of their having gone extinct or never evolving in the first place. Such minimal claims are all we need to do justice to whatever it is that is naturally plausible about correspondence. Who, I wonder, would be so bold to deny that *that there are gorillas* is true in virtue of actual existing gorillas? Yet philosophers like Rorty and Fine (see any of his 1984a, 1984b, or 1986) are happy to dismiss the very idea of ontological commitment as so much metaphysical hooey. Fine even claims that the "natural" ontological attitude is to think that while it's true that there are gorillas (for Science says so), we should not therefore embrace an ontology that includes gorillas—we should not be realists about gorillas. When we see just how modest the basic motivations behind correspondence theories are, we see just how radical (and misguided) it is to deny them whole hog.<sup>67</sup>

The basic appeal to correspondence accounts, then, is simply the idea that truths are intimately connected with reality, with the way the world is. It is thus no surprise that correspondence has often been equated with realism (too quickly, in my view). What is so strikingly unintuitive about coherence, pragmatic, and epistemic accounts of truth is that they tie truth to something other than the world—to other propositions, practical utility, or properties of our evidence gathering abilities. It is the worldliness of correspondence

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<sup>67</sup>Part of the problem here is that folks like Rorty and Fine try to push a distinction between the truth of 'There are gorillas' and the truth of 'There *really* are gorillas in the *World*'. I for one see no distinction, and sense that Rorty and Fine are attacking a straw man. Fine's invocation of words like 'fantasy' and 'paradise' to describe realism should lead him to rethink whether he has fairly characterized his opponent (1984b: 102). See Musgrave 1989. I'm obviously sympathetic to the familiar idea that self-proclaimed quietists are really just realists who employ overblown rhetoric. See footnote 13 in section 4.1.

accounts that gives them their default status.<sup>68</sup> Equipped with philosophical jargon, the best way we may express the correspondence intuition and the worldliness of truth is that truths carry ontological and metaphysical commitments, that what is true has immediate consequences for what there is, and how it is.<sup>69</sup>

If my diagnosis is correct, then the driving force behind correspondence theories and truthmaker theory is one and the same: we need to account for the metaphysical and ontological implications that accompany truths. Hence, many have taken the two kinds of theories to be one and the same, since they appear to be responses to the very same instinct. But they are not. Correspondence theory aims to reveal the nature of *truth* itself—it seeks to give an analysis of the property of truth in terms of facts and a correspondence relation. Truthmaker theory aims to reveal the ontological grounds for *truths*—the things in the world on which particular truths depend. So truthmaker theory is also motivated by the worldliness of truth. In fact, as I shall now argue, it captures that worldliness better than do correspondence theories. Hence, those who are attracted to correspondence theory should reject it and adopt truthmaker theory instead.

Traditionally, truthmaker theorists have faced difficulties in trying to spell out their core notions: what is *correspondence*, and what is a *fact*? Facts are often thought to be ontologically burdensome, and it can be difficult accounting for what they are without antecedently relying on the notion of truth. A first reason to prefer truthmaker theory is that it tends to be more ontologically economical with respect to facts than correspondence theory. On any standard correspondence account, for anything one takes to be true there must be

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<sup>68</sup>In section 4.5, I relate the worldliness of truth described here to what others (particularly Alston—see his 1996 and 2001) have dubbed “realism” about truth. As I argue later, bringing up realism in this context is more likely to confuse than to illuminate.

<sup>69</sup>This idea will get systematic treatment in section 4.2.

some fact in one's ontology to which it corresponds. Take, for example, the truth that there are penguins. A correspondence theorist must take that truth to correspond to some fact—call it 'P'. So the truth that there are penguins here commits us not only to the existence of penguins, but to P as well. But here we have ontological overkill. What we need are penguins, not P, to satisfy the “correspondence intuition” with respect to the truth that there are penguins. That claim is true because of the existence of penguins, not because of the very different sort of entity P. The correspondence theory's extra addition here is playing no helpful role. So in the case of many truths we do not need any facts at all to account for their truth or to satisfy the worldly nature of such truths, and so postulating them is excessive. Hence, even if one adopts a theory of truthmakers that involves facts (as does Armstrong's, for example), one need not posit as many kinds of facts as does the correspondence theorist.

A second reason to favor truthmaker theory is that it avoids the traditional problem facing correspondence theorists of giving a satisfying account of the correspondence relation. At least in its very simple version where for every distinct truth there is a distinct fact, correspondence theories offer an overloaded and unilluminating ontology. The world is a world of facts, and those facts come in various shades: positive, negative, conjunctive, disjunctive, existential, ethical, aesthetic, counterfactual, etc. A one-one correspondence relation comes with ontological extravagance, but a more subtle relation is notoriously difficult to articulate. The truthmaking relation, by contrast, is a many-many relation, and so we do not need a distinct kind of truthmaker for each kind of truth. Furthermore, though correspondence is usually taken to hold with respect to facts and facts alone,<sup>70</sup> anything can be (and everything is) a truthmaker. We have met this argument already. Take any existing entity  $x$ :  $x$  is a truthmaker for the truth that  $x$  exists. The world is a world of truthmakers;

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<sup>70</sup>Though again, this is something of a recent (i.e., twentieth-century) development. See Künne 2003: 94.

accordingly, the very idea of a truthmaker is not limited to any particular ontological worldview. Even the nominalist's world is a world full of truthmakers. So truthmaker theorists have far greater ontological flexibility and resources when satisfying the correspondence intuition. Besides, facts aren't the only things that can ground truth—consider again the truth that there are penguins. If the world is more than a world of facts (a Moorean truth, I dare say), then the rest of the world provides grounds for truths, too.

In addition to dodging some of the traditional problems for correspondence theories, truthmaker theory also enjoys some other theoretical advantages. Truthmaker theory scores points for theoretical economy by speaking to a number of metaphysical concerns at once. Truthmaker theorists disagree as to what sorts of entities we should posit in order to serve as truthmakers. For example, is truthmaker theory better served by Armstrongian states of affairs or by tropes?<sup>71</sup> Notice that these sorts of metaphysical posits are also front and center in the traditional debate over the existence of universals, and the debate over how to account for the genuine resemblances between objects and their causal powers (more on this in the next chapter). Tropes, as well as the universals that partially compose Armstrongian states of affairs, are the kinds of entities that metaphysicians posit in order to ground the objective resemblances between things, to solve the “problem of the one over the many”, and to understand the nature of the powers that objects possess (see Lewis 1983). Truthmaker theorists can use their posited truthmakers to satisfy the correspondence intuition (by grounding truths in worldly objects) while at the same time tackling the problem of universals and accounting for causality. It is not at all obvious, though, that the correspondence theorist's facts can be immediately used to account for genuine resemblances

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<sup>71</sup>See Armstrong 1997 and 2004 for extensive discussion of the relative merits of states of affairs versus tropes in truthmaker theory.

and causal powers. A familiar worry for the correspondence theorist's posits is that they are *ad hoc*: they serve no purpose other than their role in correspondence theory.<sup>72</sup>

To be fair, correspondence theorists can use their realm of facts to account for resemblance and causality if they understand their posits in terms of universals and particulars, as does Armstrong. But recall that correspondence theorists need more facts than does Armstrong—they need the fact P to correspond to the truth that there are penguins, the fact A to correspond to the truth that there are aardvarks, and plenty more. What's unclear is what metaphysical role P and A are supposed to serve other than filling in the gaps of correspondence theory.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, if correspondence theorists are to make the case that their facts can be used to solve other metaphysical issues because their facts are composed of universals, then it looks like their hands are tied when it comes to the traditional questions concerning realism about universals. Correspondence theorists, for instance, are not free to explore the merits of trope theory, lest they end up in ontological extravagance with a world made up by universals *and* tropes.<sup>74</sup> Truthmaker theorists, by contrast, are not so constrained. They are free to explore the competing merits of universals and tropes (and other positions in the realism/nominalism debate) without being antecedently committed to a world of facts and universals.

Finally, truthmaker theory also provides greater theoretical flexibility than correspondence theory when it comes to accounting for traditionally problematic truths.

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. Quine 1990: "facts contribute nothing beyond their specious support of a correspondence theory" (80). See also Davidson 1996: "facts or states of affairs have never been shown to play a useful role in semantics" (266).

<sup>73</sup>It's also unclear how such "existential facts" can be composed of universals. Is there a universal *existence*? Correspondence theory now look to be committed to the further view, not so popular nowadays, that existence is a property.

<sup>74</sup>One might try to build a correspondence theory around truths corresponding to tropes rather than facts. (Something like this is operant in Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984.) This is a hard road to travel, for it's unclear how tropes can be used to account for negative existentials and general truths, for instance.

Consider again the trickiest set of truths for truthmaker theory: negative existentials. What makes it true that there are no hobbits? Perhaps there are negative facts (Russell 1985), absences (Martin 1996), or one giant totality state of affairs (Armstrong 2004) that make it true. But we have seen another option: perhaps negative existentials don't have truthmakers at all (Bigelow 1988, Lewis 1992 and 2001b). Truthmaker maximalism is not a *sine qua non* of truthmaker theory. It may be that the best response to negative existentials is not to ground their truth in existing entities. Thus, it may be that not all truths have truthmakers, a consequence that is perfectly consistent with the spirit of truthmaker theory. But if some correspondence theory is the correct theory of truth, then every truth *must* have a corresponding object. There can be no "non-maximalist" correspondence theory. If truth just is correspondence with fact, then every truth has to correspond with some fact or other. Hence, correspondence theorists' hands are more tied than are truthmaker theorists' when it comes to handling negative existentials. There is a highly appealing route available to truthmaker theorists that is closed off to correspondence theorists.

Rather than adding facts and a correspondence relation to our ontology, we need to account for the worldliness of truth via a theory of truthmakers. Truthmaker theory accomplishes that task without being biased as to the nature of what those objects are (for truthmakers are not limited only to certain kinds of ontologies), without relying on *ad hoc* posits, and without positing the existence of a one-one correspondence relation. Truthmaker theory is the more economical, ontologically flexible, and theoretically desirable means for preserving the motivation behind correspondence theory.

As I have argued, truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth, but it does advance the debate over the nature of truth. In particular, it helps to undermine the motivation for

accepting a correspondence theory of truth, precisely because of the similarities between the two theories. In fact, we can now see correspondence theories in a new light. One way to read correspondence theories—which I find quite illuminating—is to read them as trying to do two distinct theoretical tasks in tandem: they seek to offer an account of the nature of truth—saying what it is in common between all and only truths—and to offer a theory of truthmaking—saying what it is in the world on which those truths depend.<sup>75</sup> Because correspondence theories can be seen to be doing both sorts of work—and not clearly distinguishing between the two—it is no great surprise that many conflate the two projects, and think that the downfall of correspondence theories is accompanied by the downfall of metaphysics. But truth may well have no such nature (as we shall explore in the next chapter), rendering the correspondence theorist’s first theoretical aim unnecessary. And the truthmaking account on offer by traditional correspondence theories is, it’s fair to say, rather “flat-footed”.<sup>76</sup> What makes it true that  $p$  is that the fact that  $p$ . What makes it true that  $q$  is the fact that  $q$ . At least in its very simple version where for every distinct truth there is a distinct fact, correspondence theories offer an overloaded and unilluminating ontology. The world is a world of facts and nothing else, and those facts come in various shades: positive, negative, conjunctive, disjunctive, existential, counterfactual, etc. A one-one correspondence relation is extravagant; but a more subtle relation, as noted earlier, is famously difficult to articulate. We’re better off ditching the correspondence program altogether. There is no nature to truth, and the grounds needed for truth is a topic more usefully and flexibly explored via truthmaker theory.

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<sup>75</sup>Cf. David 2009.

<sup>76</sup>This expression I owe to Blackburn, who uses it to describe various realist explanations about certain topics better handled by pragmatists.

The thesis I am urging can be distilled down to the following: the fundamental motivations driving correspondence accounts of truth are actually better served by well worked-out theories of ontological and metaphysical commitment than by more traditional attempts at giving a correspondence theory of truth.<sup>77</sup> Rather than adding facts and a correspondence relation to our ontology, we need to locate the worldliness of truth via a theory of metaphysical commitment, a theory that articulates what the metaphysical and ontological consequences are for all that we take to be true. Truthmaker theory, of course, is nothing but a theory of such metaphysical commitments. As a result, it is perfectly suited to ground the inclinations that make the notion of correspondence seem so natural. For a fully articulated truthmaker theory will tell us precisely what it is in the world that properly grounds the statements we take to be true.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, truthmaker theory accomplishes that task without being biased as to the nature of what those corresponding objects are (for truthmakers are not limited only to certain kinds of ontologies), and without positing the existence of a supposedly mysterious correspondence relation that has long been the embarrassment of traditional correspondence theorists. Even further, since truthmaker theory is not necessarily bound by truthmaker maximalism, we can make room for truths that do not carry ontological or metaphysical commitments, thus making room for a more subtle approach to realism debates.<sup>79</sup> By trying to ground the worldliness of truth in an additional

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<sup>77</sup>As we've seen, Dummett may have made exactly this point inadvertently when he used what now goes for truthmaking language in describing the real essence of correspondence truth.

<sup>78</sup>Stefano Caputo agrees with my take on the correspondence intuition, and argues that truthmaking is the "one thing needed [to] be saved in the correspondence theory" (2007: 276).

<sup>79</sup>Merricks (2007) does a good job of showing how many of the classic counterexamples to truthmaker maximalism (e.g., negative existentials and subjunctive conditionals) can also be used as counterexamples to correspondence theories of truth. At this point, I uphold only the generic (but not universal) claim that truths carry ontological and metaphysical commitments. Thus we have room, unlike correspondence theorists, for understanding truths that have no truthmaker.

realm of fact, correspondence theorists have gone too far in their ontological ambitions.<sup>80</sup> To do proper justice to the worldliness of truth, we must—as far as is possible—locate the ontological ground of our familiar truths (that there is snow) in the familiar objects those truths are about (snow). Otherwise we lose touch with what was supposed to be obvious and natural about correspondence theories of truth. Truthmaker theory is perfectly suited to perform precisely that task.

When I claim that truthmaker theories undermine correspondence theories, what I mean is that truthmaker theory is better suited to accommodate the worldliness of truth, which is what I claim to be the real source of what makes correspondence truth seem so natural and intuitive.<sup>81</sup> Truthmaker theory accommodates the correspondence intuition, and does so in an ontologically neutral way (at least if truthmaker theory is practiced according to the methods I have been advocating). Further, by eschewing correspondence accounts of truth, we do not have to bear the burden of offering an account of the correspondence relation. The lack of an adequate account has been a favorite target of opponents for over a century now. But truthmaker theory does not simply relieve us of the need to offer a correspondence relation; truthmaker theory shows why positing *any* sort of metaphysically robust property or relation of truth is misguided. Doing so, when combined with truthmaker theory, leads to unacceptable metaphysical consequences. Correspondence accounts posit the existence of a

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<sup>80</sup>I do allow that there might be other motivations for adopting an ontology of facts—truthmaking motivations, for instance. Armstrong’s work from his 1978 to the present does just that quite admirably. The point to recognize is that even if facts serve as good *truthmakers*, they need not enter into our theory of *truth*. By the same token, if one thinks that there are facts or states of affairs, then one should believe in them because of his or her theory of truthmakers, not of truth.

<sup>81</sup>Cf. David: “friends of the truth-maker principle maintain that it captures something (important) that is right in the correspondence theory; and those not sympathetic towards the correspondence theory would add that it captures *all* that is right in the correspondence theory, which is not very much” (2009: 137). I consider myself to be someone friendly to truthmaking, but unsympathetic toward correspondence (though I distance myself from the thought that there is “not very much” right about correspondence views).

two-place correspondence relation, but other theories of truth are metaphysically substantive as well. In the next chapter, we shall see how positing any robust property of truth is a fatal mistake.

### 3. Truthmaking and Deflationary Truth

Given that truthmaker theory does not offer a theory of truth, it is in no way obvious that truthmaking and deflationism about truth should come into any conflict. They are simply up to different things. Now, the leading advocates of deflationary theories of truth, it is safe to say, are not the leading advocates of truthmaker theory. Unsurprisingly, if many (mistakenly) have taken truthmaker theory to be a kind of correspondence theory, then of course it will be thought that truthmaker theory and deflationism are incompatible. But they are not. In fact, advocates of truthmakers have an argument for a certain kind of deflationary thesis, namely, that there is no metaphysically substantive property of truth. The goal of the present chapter is to articulate just what deflationary theories of truth are, and then show how they are perfectly compatible with the kind of truthmaking investigation in which we are interested. It is often thought that the ambitious approach to metaphysics employed by truthmaker theorists sits uneasily with deflationary perspectives on truth. But such an attitude, I hope to show, is mistaken. Deflationists can (and should be) truthmaker theorists. Finally, I argue that truthmaker theory actually serves to undermine any metaphysically robust approach to the property of truth (and so I shall say precisely what “metaphysically robust” comes to here).

#### 3.1. Deflationary theories of truth

Just as there is no single correspondence theory of truth, there is no single deflationary theory of truth. ‘Deflationism’ denotes a genre that includes many species. I do

not wish to set myself up in a trap by saying what defines all and only deflationary theories, for any such account will likely be susceptible to immediate refutation by counterexample. Wolfgang Kühne, finding ‘deflationism’ to be so amorphous a term as to be without any salvageable consistent meaning, recommends adding it to Otto Neurath’s *Index Verborum Prohibitorum* (2003: 20). Let us rest content with taking deflationism as a notion admitting merely of family resemblance. Thankfully, there is a fair consensus as to what views count as deflationary. *Loci classici* include Ramsey 1927, Strawson 1949, Ayer 1952, Quine 1970, Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975, Leeds 1978, Williams 1986, Horwich 1990, and Field 1994a. David 1994 is perhaps the most thorough analysis and critique of the deflationary camp. Such views attempt to distinguish themselves from more substantive or “inflationary” views like the correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, and epistemic accounts.<sup>1</sup>

There are various theses to which various figures in the deflationary camp subscribe, though it is hard to find any universal agreement. F. P. Ramsey (1927) is typically heralded as the father of the redundancy view of truth, which offers that to predicate truth of a sentence is merely to produce a sentence that says nothing more than the original (see also Ayer 1952). To say that ‘Snow is white’ is true is no more than to say that snow is white. Hence the predication of truth is merely redundant, or, in Blackburn’s helpful phrase, “transparent” (1984b). The redundancy theorist’s view here, however, is not proprietary to redundancy theory. Frege admits it whole-heartedly (1956), though few if any find his primitivism about truth (or his thinking that truth is the referent of all truths—see his 1952)

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<sup>1</sup>Where does Tarski fall? I leave the matter to Tarski scholars. For some discussion see Musgrave 1996 and Kühne 2003. See also footnote 56 of the previous chapter.

deserving of the label ‘deflationist’.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, I think that everyone should admit the transparency claim, deflationist or not.<sup>3</sup> Subtleties aside, it seems that the truth of granting that “‘Snow is white’ is true’ and ‘Snow is white’ are equivalent in some sense is guaranteed by the validity of the truth schema,<sup>4</sup> here in its disquotational version:

(T<sub>3</sub>) ‘*p*’ is true if and only if *p*.

It is difficult to imagine anyone disagreeing with the disquotation schema, at least under some interpretation or other. Under what conditions would the two sides of the biconditional have differing truth-values?<sup>5</sup> Perhaps one could argue that although the truth-values never differ, the quoted side that predicates truth still may differ in meaning (or some other respect) from the disquoted side. Even so, there still would be some sense of equivalence obtaining between the two (even if only material equivalence). If anything distinguishes the redundancy view from other theories of truth, it must be in claiming that there is nothing else to be said about truth.

Similar comments apply to the disquotational views defended by Quine (1970) and Field (1994a). (Disquotationalism is also the specific target of David 1994.) According to Quine, disquotationalism is “the valid residue of the correspondence theory of truth” (1990:

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<sup>2</sup>Hence, Frege may best be understood as someone who is deflationist about the word ‘truth’ but not about truth itself (understood as a concept or property). See the distinction below between the different kinds of deflationism.

<sup>3</sup>One example of a non-deflationist who nevertheless accepts Ramsey’s point about transparency may well be Ramsey himself. In his 1927, Ramsey expresses sympathy with pragmatism, suggesting the possibility that he accepted the transparency view of ‘is true’ while adopting a pragmatic account of truth. See Loar 1980. But see also Young 2009, which places Ramsey in opposition to pragmatic theories, and in favor of correspondence theories.

<sup>4</sup>Which, in turn, is validated by the inferential role that ‘is true’ plays in English. One need not subscribe to deflationism in order to embrace the T-sentences. One need only be a competent speaker of English.

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, there are subtleties at work here that may lead some to criticize the disquotation schema. Does the schema ensure that meaning is preserved across the biconditional? What are meanings anyway? Can the schema adequately handle ambiguity and context-sensitivity? It is worth mentioning that Field, the most ardent contemporary defender of the disquotational theory of truth, recommends an account of the disquotation schema that is more sophisticated than the one that I have offered (1994a).

93). The disquotationalists go beyond the redundancy theorists by articulating some of the logical properties of the truth predicate. After granting the legitimacy of the disquotation schema, advocates of the disquotational view note how the truth predicate enables us to make certain kinds of generalizations that otherwise would be inexpressible. We can make generalizations such as ‘All conditionals of the form ‘ $p$  only if  $p$ ’ are true’ without enumerating each and every instance of the generalization. (Besides, it’s not at all clear that the enumeration of instances even means the same thing as the generalization—see David 2004. If not, then the truth predicate lets us say something that we couldn’t say without it. If they do mean the same thing, then the truth predicate is an enormous convenience.) Such an enumeration would be infinitely long, and so remain inexpressible by finite creatures like us. Similarly, we can state that surely something Kant said is true without bothering to mention the gigantic disjunction of each of Kant’s claims. Furthermore, we can use truth to state sentences like ‘What Bill said yesterday is true’ even if we have forgotten what Bill said. Here we have a case of using ‘true’ to make *blind* truth ascriptions.<sup>6</sup> Had we remembered that he had said that Cheney is a gorilla, we could simply have forgone the truth predicate and just said that Cheney is a gorilla. The fact that our language has a truth predicate proves to be a very useful feature of it.

But again: what here is up for debate? The account of the linguistic and logical properties of the truth predicate discovered and articulated by disquotationalists seems to be exactly right. They are common ground. Need the correspondence theorist deny the linguistic felicities enabled by the truth predicate? Of course not. If the disquotational view is to separate itself from other views of truth, it must distinguish itself with a negative claim: that the linguistic properties of the truth predicate exhaust everything there is to say about truth.

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<sup>6</sup>Azzouni makes much of the topic of blind ascriptions in his work on truth. See his 2001, 2004, and 2006.

For the disquotationalist, the truth predicate does not have the feature, say, of assigning to sentences a substantive property that admits of philosophical analysis.

Similar to disquotational theories are those theories that employ propositions rather than sentences (Horwich 1990 and 1998, Künne 2003). Such theorists subscribe to a denominalization schema rather than a disquotation schema:

(**T**<sub>2</sub>) The proposition that  $p$  is true if and only if  $p$ .

Worries about **T**<sub>2</sub> arise immediately regarding just how to formulate this proposition postulating position. (We can set aside for the moment any particular worries about propositions themselves.) Horwich offers his “minimalist” theory of truth as being exhausted by the infinite list of the (non-paradoxical) instances of **T**<sub>2</sub>.<sup>7</sup> As such, his theory of truth is, by his own admission, not able to be stated. Others have attempted to accept **T**<sub>2</sub> as a universal generalization, and then appeal to an account of substitutional quantification (in a version which does not in turn depend upon the notion of truth) in order to render it intelligible (Hill 2002, Künne 2003). Again, there seems to be nothing objectionable to **T**<sub>2</sub> as it stands. Assuming it to be intelligible, it is nothing but a source of acceptable truths. Thus, denominalizers must distinguish themselves by denying that there is more to be said about truth.

The prosentential theory does manage to set itself apart from the other deflationary views (Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975, Grover 1992 and 2001).<sup>8</sup> On the prosentential view, ‘true’ is no part of any predicate. It is instead part of a *prosentence*. The prosentential application of truth is most apparent in exchanges like the following:

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<sup>7</sup>As noted previously, Horwich later adds to his deflationary account the axiom that only propositions are true (1998: 43).

<sup>8</sup>See also Brandom 1994, which departs somewhat from the other prosententialist views.

Bill: Cheney is a gorilla.

Jill: That is true.

According to the prosentential theory, Jill uses ‘is true’ not as a predicate applying to Bill’s sentence, but as part of a prosentence, namely, ‘That is true’. Rather than stating Bill’s very sentence again, Jill “lazily” uses the prosentence as a replacement. In effect, Jill just says what Bill says; she does not say something *about* what Bill said. Similarly, had she said ‘He is a gorilla’, Jill “lazily” would have used the pronoun ‘he’ rather than mention Cheney again explicitly. There certainly is something correct about such anaphoric uses of ‘is true’; everyone can admit that Jill is wielding ‘true’ in a perfectly acceptable fashion. What is distinctive to prosentential theories is that they take such anaphoric uses to be both primary and exhaustive: uses of ‘true’ always must be understood in the manner of prosententialism. Unlike the other deflationary theses, I think the prosententialist’s *is* proprietary and unique to their camp. The prosentential view, like its other deflationary siblings, is motivated by the desire to dodge traditional philosophical problems involving truth. If ‘true’ is not even a predicate, then there arises no metaphysical question as to its status as a robust metaphysical property, or whatever.<sup>9</sup> But given that the motivations underlying prosententialism can be satisfied by other deflationary views that do not require its distinctive and controversial commitments, I shall set it aside in what follows.

Setting prosententialism aside, then, we can see that most of the positive things that deflationists say about truth are claims that can and should be accepted by anyone,

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<sup>9</sup>Maybe. For those who take the existence of properties to be a serious ontological matter, there will be no identification of a property for every predicate. (Here we are employing a “sparse” sense of ‘property’ in the language of Lewis 1983.) But if there is no one-one correlation between properties and predicates, such that there are predicates that correspond to no property, then there might also be properties that correspond to no predicate. (Just think of any properties we have yet to discover.) I admit that holding that view about truth in particular would be in need of enormous defense, but the theoretical possibility exists.

deflationist or not. What is distinctive about deflationism is the set of negative claims that its proponents must endorse. For instance, deflationary theories of truth are often defined (more often than not, it is worth noticing, by their opponents) simply as the thesis that there is no property of truth (e.g., Boghossian 1990: 161, Kirkham 1992: 307, Alston 1996: 41, Lynch 1998: 112, Merricks 2007: 187, and Young 2009: 564). Sometimes we are told that deflationists believe something along the lines of there being no “metaphysically substantive” or “robust” property of truth (e.g., Putnam 1991: 2, Wright 1992: 13, Blackburn 1998: 75, and Engel 2002: 41). Those simple definitions are correct in spirit, but unacceptably vague, and far too simple to capture the subtleties in various deflationary theories. Furthermore, the notion of a property is one of the most elusive in all of metaphysics, and the term ‘property’ is one of the most flexible. There are several conceptions at work in the philosophical literature; as a result, appealing to properties in any philosophical definition without proper qualification is certain to lead to confusion, ambiguity, and talking at cross purposes.

Besides, there is more to deflationism than just the question of whether there is a property of truth.<sup>10</sup> If we follow Dorit Bar-On and Keith Simmons (2007), we can divide deflationism into three distinct theses: linguistic, conceptual, and metaphysical deflationism.<sup>11</sup> Only metaphysical deflationism speaks to the issue as to whether there is a (substantive) property of truth or not. *Metaphysical deflationists*, naturally, do not believe that there is such a property. We take up this thesis in great detail below. *Linguistic deflationists* uphold the thesis that the predicate ‘is true’ does not serve to introduce

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<sup>10</sup>See O’Leary-Hawthorne and Oppy 1997 and Azzouni 2006 for nice discussions of the varieties of deflationary truth.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Lynch’s very similar tripartite account of deflationism: “that the concept of truth is a mere logical device, that the property of truth is a metaphysically transparent property, and that truth plays no significant explanatory role” (2009: 108).

propositional or cognitive content to a statement, but rather has purely logical functions (denominalizing, disquoting, generalizing, etc.). We have already seen a variety of competing views that take certain linguistic features as more primary than others. The idea common to linguistic deflationists is that the various logical roles of the truth predicate exhaust its linguistic use. *Conceptual deflationists* argue that truth is not an explanatory concept, or one that can be used to elucidate other philosophical notions such as assertion, meaning, and belief. Beyond its role as a logical device, truth bears no explanatory weight (though its logical features may be exploited in giving accounts of other notions). Neither do conceptual deflationists think that we need to appeal to any other semantic or metaphysical notions to understand the nature of truth. Truth is conceptually isolated—it stands on, and holds up no other important concepts. Here is Michael Williams: “the function of truth talk is *wholly* expressive, thus *never* explanatory. [...] What makes deflationary views deflationary is their insistence that the importance of truth talk is *exhausted* by its expressive function” (1999: 547; see also chapter 3 of Horwich 1990 and Williams 2002). Hence, deflationists think that they can account for everything there is to account for about truth by relying on nothing more than the minimal resources of their theories.<sup>12</sup>

To get a better sense of the deflationary thesis that truth is conceptually thin, consider two cases. One is handled easily by the deflationist; the other poses more substantive difficulties. Suppose, falsely, that knowledge is justified true belief.<sup>13</sup> Here we have an analysis of knowledge that explicitly appeals to truth. *Sans* truth, there is no guarantee of knowledge to be found merely in justified belief (*pace* Sutton 2007). Still, the presence of

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<sup>12</sup>Gupta calls this the “adequacy thesis” (1993: 361). See David 2002 for discussion. Field argues against conceptual deflationism in his 1986 before adopting it in his 1994a.

<sup>13</sup>But see Weatherson 2003.

truth in our account of knowledge is handled easily by the deflationist. True, S knows that  $p$  only if  $p$  is true. But the deflationist (and non-deflationists too, for that matter) may claim that ‘true’ is used in the analysis merely as a useful shortcut. For S knows that  $p$  only if  $p$  is ‘Snow is white’ and snow is white, or if  $p$  is ‘Cheney is a gorilla’ and Cheney is a gorilla, or if  $p$  is ‘Bill kills Jill’ and Bill kills Jill, and so forth. The appeal to truth in our false account of knowledge poses no problem for conceptual deflationism.

Contrast the knowledge case with that of assertion. Here, Bar-On and Simmons (2007) have argued forcefully against the deflationist by arguing that an adequate account of assertion requires a conceptual connection to truth that cannot be allowed by the deflationist. Following Frege, they suggest that we do not succeed in making an assertion merely by predicating ‘is true’ of some thought. The actor on the stage no more asserts that Cheney is a gorilla by saying ‘It is true that Cheney is a gorilla’ than by saying ‘Cheney is a gorilla’. As Frege writes, “In order to put something forward as true, we do not need a special predicate: we only need the assertoric force with which the sentence is uttered” (1979: 233). To understand what assertoric force is, one must rely on a prior understanding of truth. But that reliance on truth goes beyond its role in disquotation and denominalization. For if what it is to assert  $p$  is to put forward  $p$  as true, we cannot simply drop the use of ‘true’ here in typical deflationist fashion. To assert  $p$  is not simply to put forward  $p$ . We can conjecture that  $p$ , we can deny that  $p$ , we can wonder whether  $p$ . All are modes of putting forward  $p$ . But to capture what is distinctive about assertion, we must rely on a prior conception of truth, one that goes beyond truth’s role as a device for disquotation and denominalization. Hence, Bar-On and Simmons argue against conceptual deflationism on the grounds that we have an important

conceptual connection between truth and assertion that is left unaccounted for by the various linguistic and logical properties of the truth predicate.<sup>14</sup>

Different theorists adopt different combinations of these deflationary theses. Frege (1956) upholds linguistic deflationism, but rejects conceptual deflationism (and probably metaphysical deflationism, too, depending upon how it's construed). Horwich (1990) upholds linguistic and conceptual deflationism, but rejects metaphysical deflationism.<sup>15</sup> Jody Azzouni adopts (something like) linguistic and metaphysical deflationism, but stresses how they must be argued for along very different lines (2006: 109). Ultimately, I advance a view that is metaphysically deflationist and conceptually substantivist (because primitivist). As for linguistic deflationism, it seems compelling, at least for “first-order” appearances of ‘true’ like ‘It is true that snow is white’ that directly apply truth to truth-bearers. Certain “second-order” appearance of ‘true’ such as in ‘To assert is to present as true’, however, are potentially more problematic (see Simmons 2006). Still, once the issues of metaphysical and conceptual deflationism are resolved, nothing terribly philosophically interesting will remain that turns on linguistic deflationism (at least for the purposes of the present project). In any event, we shall not be focusing on linguistic deflationism, and truthmaking puts no particular pressure on it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>See also Bar-On, Horisk, and Lycan 2000 for an argument to the effect that deflationists cannot offer an adequate theory of meaning. Wright (1992, chapter 1 and 2001) puts forward for an argument that deflationists cannot capture a distinct norm involved in truth. In my 2009 I argue that constructive empiricism, via its reliance on the semantic conception of theories, cannot adopt a deflationary conception of truth in articulating what is at stake between realists and anti-realists. See also Gupta 1993, which shares the suspicion that deflationists cannot account for “all the facts about truth”.

<sup>15</sup>At least, Horwich admits that there is a property of truth, but not a substantive property of truth (1990: 38-41). Perhaps the best interpretation of Horwich is that he would agree with metaphysical deflationism, at least as we are about to understand it.

<sup>16</sup>Here is a very brief argument against linguistic deflationism. The strengthened liar sentence (‘This sentence is not true’) is a case of a well-formed English sentence whose employment of ‘true’ cannot be disquoted away. Ditto for the truth teller (‘This sentence is true’). So, even in principle, all uses of ‘true’ in English cannot be

## 3.2. The compatibility of truthmaking and deflationism

### 3.2.1. The case against compatibility

Now let us investigate whether there is anything in the notion of truthmaking that conflicts with deflationary perspectives on truth.<sup>17</sup> Earlier I briefly argued that truthmaker nihilism—the thesis that there are no truthmakers—is untenable. Everything is a truthmaker for at least some truth, namely, the truth that that very thing exists. Granting that premise, truthmaker nihilism is true just in case nothing exists. But something exists, so truthmaker nihilism is false. Is it possible, though, that something could fail to be a truthmaker for the truth that it exists? I do not think so. Some object *X* is a truthmaker for *that X exists* just in case *that X exists* is purely synthetic (it certainly seems to be, lest a matter of fact turn into a relation of ideas), that the truth of *that X exists* depends upon the existence of *X* (no worries about mismatched truthmaking here), and it is metaphysically necessary that if *X* exists, then *that X exists* is true. To deny that last condition is tantamount to admitting a possible world in which *X* exists, but where *that X exists* is not true. Here we have a failure of the truth schema, for *X* exists if and only if *that X exists* is true. No one should deny an instance of the truth schema. Certainly no deflationist should deny an instance of the truth schema! Deflationists even typically hold that the instances of the disquotation and denominalization schemas are necessary truths. So deflationists have no business in endorsing truthmaker nihilism. If there

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done away with without giving up on some expressive resources of the language. (Maybe this would be a good thing, given my examples!)

<sup>17</sup>Recall that McGrath also takes up the question of deflationism and truthmaking in his appropriately titled 2003. As we saw, the kind of truthmaking he finds to be consistent with deflationism is empty. He seems to take it for granted that the notion of truthmaking that he doesn't like (which I have identified as the kind of truthmaking of interest to the rest of the literature) is inconsistent with deflationism.

are any versions of deflationary truth that are inconsistent with there being instances of truthmaking, those versions are false.<sup>18</sup>

One reason—perhaps the most fundamental reason—why one might take truthmaking and deflationism to be at odds with one another is due to the mistaken belief that truthmaker theory just is a theory of truth (correspondence truth even), and thus is a competitor with and not an ally to deflationism.<sup>19</sup> The last chapter has taken care of that confusion. We need to separate the project of giving the nature of *truth* from the project of understanding and uncovering the metaphysical and ontological underpinnings or grounds of the *truths* that we accept. Since truthmaking deals with the latter project, and not the former, it does not come into immediate conflict with deflationary theories.

A second reason to worry that truthmaking and deflationism come into conflict involves a mistaken understanding about the nature of deflationism about truth. The idea is that in adopting deflationism about truth, one gives up on the substantial kinds of ontological and metaphysical inquiries that characterize truthmaker theory.<sup>20</sup> Here we have a conflation

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<sup>18</sup>James Young (2009) argues that deflationists who avail themselves of truthmaking talk (he cites Horwich 1998: 104-105 and Strawson 1998) in so doing betray their *rejection* of deflationism and acceptance of correspondence. His argument, of course, crucially relies on the false identification of truthmaker theory and correspondence theory. Vision suggests that “at first glance it would appear that deflationists must simply deny that anything accounts for a proposition’s being true” (2005: 365). Such a glance is distorted, for it again assumes too tight a connection between truth and truthmaking.

<sup>19</sup>See Armstrong 2006: 245, which suggests that those who posit truths without truthmakers might have a deflationary view of truth in mind when so doing. See also Armstrong 2005, Cameron 2008d: 108, and Mumford 2005: 269. Underlying this hunch is the idea that truths with truthmakers enjoy a kind of correspondence truth, while truthmaker gaps enjoy a kind of deflationary truth. Such dualisms about truth should be avoided in the extreme. (Armstrong agrees.) But the issue here is not about whether there are different kinds of *truth* because truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth at all.

<sup>20</sup>See Horgan and Timmons 2000, which describes deflationary theories of truth as ones “that attempt to make sense of truth ascription without robust metaphysical commitments” (146). I detect a similar sentiment in Blackburn (particularly salient at his 2009: 207-208). Deflationary views may hold that sentences need not be committed to *facts* or a correspondence relation in order to be true, but it’s no part of deflationism to say that truths carry no metaphysical commitments at all, as the following discussion will make manifest. Vision writes that some deflationists “draw the more ambitious conclusion that there is no need for worldly truthmakers anywhere”, but he does not name names (2008: 47; see also his 2003).

between two theoretically distinct deflationary attitudes. On the one hand there is the deflationary view of *truth*. On the other hand there is a deflationary view toward *metaphysics*. To be a deflationist about truth is not automatically to be a deflationist about metaphysics. Hence, one can be a deflationist about *truth* but not about metaphysics more generally, and so engage in truthmaker theory. Deflationism about truth offers an account of the nature (or lack thereof) of truth; truthmaker theory offers an account of what the ontological implications are of what we take to be true. Absent an account of how the former forecloses on the latter, there is no reason to think that being a deflationist would prevent one from engaging in the latter task.<sup>21</sup>

It may be a sociological fact that most deflationists about truth (or at least the most vocal and prominent defenders of the view) have deflationary attitudes toward metaphysics. But here we have a matter of fact, and not a matter of logic. If there is any slope from deflationism about truth to deflationism about metaphysics (which I doubt), it is not all that slippery. In fact, there would be a kind of irony to be found in a deflationist about truth's thinking that truthmaking was somehow inconsistent with his own theory, or with metaphysical investigation more generally. It would be ironic for deflationists to resist truthmaker theory because they thought that such metaphysical investigation was barred on deflationary grounds, for to do so is to underestimate the power of deflationary theories of truth, and to assign to truth an inflated theoretical role that it does not possess. As we shall see in detail shortly, the enterprise of truthmaker theory and the enterprise of taking on

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<sup>21</sup>No good reason, anyway. Lynch presents the deflationist as someone who thinks that “nothing makes judgments true” (2009: 163). We have already seen why any truthmaker nihilist, in our sense, is saddled with a dilemma between an empty universe and contradiction. Lynch is thinking that the only things that could make judgments true are substantive properties of truth (cf. Davidson 1973-1974: 16, which seems to assume that only facts can be truthmakers). Hence, since a deflationist believes in no such things, the deflationist will deny that judgments are made true. But this is not how we should be thinking about truthmaking. In fact, the very argument of this chapter will show why taking any property of truth to have truthmaking powers is metaphysically devastating.

metaphysical and ontological commitments need not presuppose a substantive theory of truth. We can understand the role that truth plays in truthmaker theory and metaphysics more generally in typical deflationary fashion. Indeed, in the next chapter we will see more clearly why metaphysical debates are best pursued *not* in terms of the theory of truth. So to think that deflationism about truth leads to a rejection of truthmaking is to underestimate the resources of deflationary theories. Deflationists should not underestimate the power of their own view!

To be a deflationist about truth, then, is not to be some sort of metaphysical nihilist or quietist. Certainly no such view emerged during our tour of the various kinds of deflationism surveyed above. Further, simply consider someone like Quine, who adopts two separate theses. First, he is a deflationist about truth; on his disquotationalist view, truth is merely a device for disquotation, abbreviation, and the like (1970). Second, he adopts his criterion for ontological commitment: to ontologically commit oneself to something is to quantify over it in some theory one accepts (once it is properly regimented into first-order logic) (1960). Now, Quine begrudgingly admits that he must take on some robust mathematical commitments because he accepts theories that quantify over mathematical entities, such as sets. Quine, in other words, takes on some hefty metaphysical commitments, but not in any way because of his deflationist theory of truth.<sup>22</sup> That Quine denies that ‘There are sets’ stands in the correspondence relation to some fact is beside the point. Further, although Quine would admit that there is nothing more to the truth of ‘There are sets’ than there being sets, he would not thereby deny that ‘There are sets’ incurs ontological commitments.<sup>23</sup> The lesson here, which I think has been underappreciated, is that even if *truth* is not a metaphysically

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Grover 2001: 512-514, which makes a similar point.

<sup>23</sup>Again, ontological commitments, strictly speaking, only follow *regimented* sentences, not those in the vernacular.

substantive notion, it does not follow that *truths* themselves lack metaphysical substance. Truths carry metaphysical commitments, even if those commitments are not to special entities called ‘facts’ or a correspondence relation.

Hence, deflationism is no easy road to metaphysical anti-realism (or quietism). Rejecting correspondence theories of truth does not (*contra* Fine 1984b and Rorty 1986) ensure that one abandons realist commitments. For too long, it has been thought that one’s attitudes about truth settle one’s attitudes about debates over realism. According to that line of thought, it might make sense why abandoning correspondence theories of truth might be thought to accompany an overall deflationary perspective on metaphysical questions, and so a rejection of truthmaking. But this is not so. Careful thinking about deflationary theories of truth on the one hand, and truthmaker theory on the other, shows that the theory of truth and the topic of realism come apart. We shall take up this topic in full detail in the next chapter. In the meantime, we need only appreciate that being a deflationist about truth does not foreclose on the possibility of taking up ontological questions (even if there is nothing positively ontological to say about *truth* itself). Hence, deflationism about truth does not foreclose on the possibility of taking up truthmaking.<sup>24</sup>

I have now dispelled what I think are the two main reasons why one might think that truthmaker theory and deflationism cannot coexist. Both reasons rely on a misunderstanding either of truthmaker theory (that it is a theory of truth) or of deflationism (that it requires a deflationary attitude toward metaphysics). If there is an incompatibility between truthmaking and deflationism when both properly understood, it will emerge, if at all, in the details. So let

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<sup>24</sup>From here on, when I use ‘deflationism’ I will refer to deflationism about truth. I shall not refer to the character of the global metaphysical deflationist introduced in the previous paragraphs as a ‘deflationist’ *simpliciter*, for doing so invites the very confusion I was dispelling in those paragraphs.

us consider whether truthmaker theory as we have been understanding it is consistent with each of the three deflationary theses: metaphysical, conceptual, and linguistic deflationism.

### 3.2.2. Truthmaking and linguistic deflationism

Linguistic deflationism, recall, is the view that the function of ‘is true’ in our language is limited to its logical and linguistic features. Our question, then, is whether the appearance of ‘true’ in truthmaker theory is playing any additional role. Lewis doesn’t think so, and thus writes that “the Truthmaker Principle coexists peacefully with the deflationary conception of truth” (2001b: 605). Lewis argues for that claim by noting how we may combine the axioms of truthmaker theory with the T-schemas in order to produce theorems in which ‘true’ does not appear. Hence we may combine the T-sentence

- (1) The proposition that Cheney is a gorilla is true if and only if Cheney is a gorilla.

and the following axiom of truthmaker maximalism (coupled with Lewis’s necessitation account of the truthmaking relation)

- (2) The proposition that Cheney is a gorilla is true if and only if there is something whose existence necessitates that Cheney is a gorilla

in order to conclude:

- (3) Cheney is a gorilla if and only if there is something whose existence necessitates that Cheney is a gorilla.

**1** is an instance of **T<sub>2</sub>**, the denominalization schema (The proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*); **2** is an instance of truthmaker maximalism combined with the necessitation account of

the truthmaking relation, **TM**<sub>2</sub>. Nothing prohibits us from combining the two in all relevant cases, so the two theories from which they follow must be consistent with each other.<sup>25</sup>

Now, we have rejected **TM**<sub>2</sub> in favor of **TM**. And **TM** invokes truth twice over:

(**TM**) For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $y$  is purely synthetic,  $y$  depends upon the existence of  $x$  for its truth, and it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true.

Take the final clause first, with its use of ‘is true’. Here we may see that the predicate is playing its familiar role as a device for generalization. Rather than state **TM** as a universal generalization, we could point to the infinite series of its axioms, pair it with the series of T-sentences, and disquote the ‘is true’ away. For example:

(4) Cheney is a truthmaker for ‘Cheney is a gorilla’ if and only if ‘Cheney is a gorilla’ is purely synthetic, ‘Cheney is a gorilla’ depends upon the existence of Cheney for its truth, and it is metaphysically necessary that if Cheney exists, then Cheney is a gorilla.

Now, there are issues surrounding the viability of such infinite lists.<sup>26</sup> But those issues are internal to the viability of deflationism all on its own. The combination with truthmaker theory here is not at issue.<sup>27</sup>

What, now, about the other appearance of truth in **TM**? When  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$ ,  $y$  depends upon the existence of  $x$  for its *truth*. Does this use of ‘truth’ pose any problem for the linguistic deflationist? Not obviously. For the deflationist can find the appearance of ‘truth’ here dispensable in the familiar way. For example, suppose alongside Armstrong 1983 that what makes it true that all copper is conductive is the state of affairs of the universals

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<sup>25</sup>Again, this point has been noticed before. See Fox 1987: 189, Bigelow 1988: 125-127, Lewis 2001b: 604, Künne 2003: 169, Merricks 2007: 187-188, footnote 14, and Horwich 2008: 263.

<sup>26</sup>This terrain is well covered. See Horwich 1990, David 1994: 107-110, Hill 2002, and Künne 2003.

<sup>27</sup>Note also that the problem I raised for employing such lists in the previous chapter dealt with those who might try to reduce the concept of truth down to truthmaking. Such lists are out of place with those who are resisting deflationism by offering truthmaking as the essence of truth. We are here embracing deflationism (if only to show its consistency with truthmaking), and so may make use of such lists.

*copper* and *conductivity* standing in the necessitation relation. Call that state of affairs ‘N’. N is the truthmaker for the truth *that all copper is conductive*; call this true truth-bearer ‘T’. T depends upon N for its truth. That is to say, T is true because of N. Now we can disquote: All copper is conductive because of N. Leaving out ‘because’, we might instead say: T is true in virtue of N. Here again we can disquote: All copper is conductive in virtue of N. We could also say, bypassing truth altogether, that N *grounds* T. This is just yet another way of articulating the main idea that **TM** is trying to capture (namely, that truthmaking requires some sort of hyperintensional notion). Hence, we can see here that the role of ‘truth’ in **TM** is its usual abbreviatory function, and so **TM** puts no special pressure on linguistic deflationism about ‘true’ and ‘truth’. Furthermore, truthmaker theory makes no claims about how ‘true’ and ‘truth’ work in English, and so is neutral with respect to the truth of linguistic deflationism. Now, it’s an important question whether these notions of dependence, being true in virtue of, and grounding themselves presuppose some non-deflationary notion of truth. But that is a question for conceptual deflationism, to which we may now turn.

### 3.2.3. Truthmaking and conceptual deflationism

Next we come to conceptual deflationism, the view that truth is a conceptually and explanatorily lightweight notion. In offering analyses of philosophical concepts, deflationists avoid appealing to truth, except in using it as a handy abbreviatory device. Truth is not to be analyzed in terms of other interesting concepts, nor are other interesting concepts to be analyzed in terms of truth. Truth stands on nothing solid, and nothing stands on it. As a result, deflationists must shy away from appealing to truth in giving accounts of other notions important to philosophy (at least, in any way that goes beyond employing truth’s various

logical and linguistic features). The job of the deflationist is either to show how we can offer such analyses without appealing to truth at all, or to show how any such reliance on truth in the analyses does not go above and beyond truth's minimal role for disquotation, denominalization, and the like.

Recall Bar-On and Simmons's critique of deflationism with respect to its inability to offer an adequate account of assertion (2007). Unlike the case of, say, knowledge, a philosophical understanding of assertion seems to require a non-deflationary attitude toward truth. Supposing their critique to be sound, we now can ask whether the case of truthmaking goes the way of knowledge, or of assertion. If the former, then deflationism is no barrier to truthmaking. If the latter, then advocates of truthmaking must find deflationism inadequate.<sup>28</sup>

We are understanding truthmaker theory in terms of three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Hence, for deflationism and truthmaking to be compatible, we must show that deflationists can accept the three notions of being purely synthetic, dependence, and necessitation. Let us take up the last one first. Necessitation, given our modal understanding of it, does invoke truth (for  $x$  necessitates  $y$  where it is metaphysically necessary that if  $x$  exists, then  $y$  is true). But we have dealt with this appearance of truth already—'true' shows up here playing no more than its usual abbreviatory role, and can be dispensed with altogether if we employ an infinite statement of the truthmaking relation. The notion of necessitation does presuppose some account of *de re* modality, but that is no threat

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<sup>28</sup>Going further, if deflationism did turn out to be unable to countenance *any* claims about truthmaking, then we would have a very strong argument against deflationary theories of truth. For we have already seen the costs associated with maintaining that there are no truthmakers.

to deflationism. To be a deflationist about truth is not to reject that objects have essential and non-essential features.<sup>29</sup>

Second, we need to be able to draw a distinction between the analytic and the synthetic in a way that does not compromise deflationism. There is certainly no *prima facie* worry here (otherwise Quine could have refuted the analytic/synthetic distinction by simply endorsing his disquotationalism). I have made passing gestures toward understanding analyticity in terms of relations between concepts. For example, there is the Kantian conception of analyticity in terms of conceptual containment. Sentences of the form ‘All F are G’ are analytic if and only if the concept of G is contained inside the concept of F. (As MALE may be contained inside BACHELOR.) According to Paul Boghossian’s epistemological conception of analyticity, a sentence is analytic just in case someone’s grasping its meaning is sufficient to make that person justified in believing it (1996: 363). ‘All bachelors are male’ is analytic just in case someone who knows what it means is justified in believing that all bachelors are male. Justification may well be best understood in terms of truth, but not in any way that compromises deflationism. For example, one might be justified in believing some sentence ‘*p*’ just in case one’s evidence makes it probable that ‘*p*’ is true. But that is just to say that one’s evidence makes it probable that *p*. So long as some such conception of analyticity is available, deflationism is no barrier to truthmaking.

Finally we come to the notion of dependence. I haven’t given a precise account of the notion of dependence, but recall that its *raison d’être* is to satisfy a hyperintensional relevance constraint on truthmaking, such that you and I do not end up as truthmakers for all necessary truths. Because of this needed relevance constraint, we cannot give a purely modal

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<sup>29</sup>Again, one who is suspicious about *all* metaphysical inquiry might have worries about *de re* modal properties, but this is an entirely optional kind of metaphysical deflationism, one to which no deflationist about truth as such is committed.

account of dependence (according to which dependence would amount to no more than the already explored necessitation condition). Further, the requisite kind of dependence needed for truthmaking, I argued, is missing in the case of analyticities. The truth of ‘Red things are colored’ does not depend upon the *existence* of the concepts RED and COLOR, even if those concepts and the relations between them somehow account for the analyticity’s truth. Is the deflationist under any pressure to reject this notion of dependence?

Here is an argument that suggests that there is.<sup>30</sup> The dependence involved in truthmaking is not just any old sort of dependence. It is a particular kind of dependence—one that holds between the *truth* of a truth-bearer and an object in the world. There are other sorts of dependence: causal dependence, the dependence of the mental on the physical, the dependence of the ethical on the natural. Truthmaking involves a special kind of dependence, a dependence uniquely related to truth, and so gives the lie to the deflationist thesis that there is nothing explanatorily potent about the concept of truth. Let us dig into the notion of dependence here and see if indeed it is something that deflationists cannot accept.

Take the truth that snow is white. Suppose we’re discussing my *belief* that snow is white.<sup>31</sup> This belief stands in a number of dependency relationships with a number of different things. The *existence* of the belief depends upon my current neural configurations, dispositions, and the like. Because of the existence of those things, my belief *exists*. My belief may also stand in causal relations to other things, such as the event of my witnessing some falling snow to be white. Here we have my belief *caused by* a certain event. Because that event happened, my belief was brought about. But it is not because of any of those things

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<sup>30</sup>This argument is due to Dorit Bar-On, and I thank her for bringing it to my attention.

<sup>31</sup>The choice of a belief here as my example truth-bearer is due to the contingency of its existence, a feature not shared, perhaps, by propositions.

that my belief is *true*. My belief is true because of the existence of its truthmaker—let's suppose it's the (Armstrongian) state of affairs of snow's being white. Because that state of affairs exists, my belief is true. So my belief stands in various dependency relations to a variety of different kinds of things. Some of those things account for its existence, others account for its truth. But the dependency relation is different in each case, and the fact that one is uniquely relevant to the *truth* of my belief shows that there is something explanatorily potent about truth, such that deflationists may not embrace the relevant kind of dependency.

Recall the argument against deflationism involving assertion. I can conjecture that snow is white, or I can assert that snow is white. There is a difference, and it seems impossible—according to Frege—to say what that is without relying on some antecedent notion of truth. Similarly, the argument goes, my belief (call it 'B') that snow is white depends in one sense upon the existence of my neurological-dispositional state D, and my belief that snow is white depends in a different sense upon the existence of S, the state of affairs of snow's being white. So B depends on D, and it also depends on S. The incompatibilist between deflationism and truthmaking must argue that the dependency between B and S cannot be understood without relying on truth in a non-deflationary way.

But I think it can be so understood. B depends upon S. We know what sort of dependence is at stake: the *truth* of B (not its existence) depends upon the existence of S. But speaking of the truth of B here amounts to no more than speaking of snow's being white. According to deflationists, when we talk about "the truth of my belief that snow is white" we're talking about no more and no less than snow's being white. And deflationists, just like everyone else, are entitled to talk about snow's being white. If pressed as to what the expression 'snow's being white' refers to, they may divide amongst themselves, or not take a

stand. It need not necessarily refer to S, that Armstrongian state of affairs that posits snow and whiteness standing in some sort of non-mereological composition relation—not everyone who concerns themselves with snow’s being white (like Tarski, say) is committed to Armstrongian metaphysics. Hence, saying that the truth of B depends upon the existence of S is equivalent to saying that snow’s being white depends upon the existence of S. Similarly, as above, copper’s being conductive depends upon the existence of N (that relation between universals).

Still, given that S is the state of affairs of snow’s being white, my claim here might sound somewhat trivial: snow’s being white depends upon the existence of snow’s being white. But the trivial sound to this sentence (or, perhaps more troubling, the absurdity of something depending upon itself) seems to be due to an equivocation on the repeated phrase. Whatever the first instance of ‘snow’s being white’ refers to, it’s not S, which is what the second instance refers to. For the first instance is supposed to be something that all parties to the debate are entitled to. But remember that taking S (an object, recall, not a truth-bearer) to be the truthmaker for snow’s being white is a substantive metaphysical position. Others don’t take snow’s being white to depend upon S, but rather upon a series of tropes, say, or lumps of snow under a certain counterpart relation. The point is that these theorists can agree on snow’s being white (that is, they can agree that it’s true that snow is white), but disagree about what that depends on. Or consider other sorts of truths: That objects fall to the ground when released depends upon the existence of the laws of nature, certain initial conditions, etc. The notion of dependence here is a genuinely metaphysical one, but is not compromised by a deflationary conception of truth.

The notion of dependence in **TM** does not threaten conceptual deflationism. Talk of the truth of one thing depending upon the existence of another can indeed be countenanced by deflationists. This becomes even more apparent when we step beyond the neutral position I advocate in **TM** and look at some specific accounts of just what kind of dependence is at stake in truthmaking. Consider, for example, how Lowe thinks about the dependence in question (2007, 2009). Lowe thinks truthmaking is a matter of “essential dependence”, such that what makes true what is a matter explicated in terms of objects’ essential features. It is of the essence of my belief that snow is white to be true if S exists. It wouldn’t be the belief that it is if it didn’t meet that condition. The reason that Socrates himself makes it true that there are humans, but not that there are philosophers, is because Socrates is essentially such that if he exists, then ‘There are humans’ is true (but not such that if he exists, then ‘There are philosophers’ is true). Which is to say, it is of the essence of Socrates that if he exists, then there are humans, but it is not of the essence of Socrates that if he exists, then there are philosophers. So talk of objects making claims true or not in virtue of essential properties can be made without talking about truth at all. The truthmaker theorist’s commitment here is to genuine *de re* modal features of objects, *not* to a substantive conception of truth. Once we dig into the details of dependence, we can see how it does not compromise deflationism.

Finally, let’s consider some remarks that Schaffer makes about dependency. Schaffer thinks that the dependency relevant to truthmaking is one of grounding, and he finds the same notion of grounding in other corners of philosophy (2008a: 311). For example, he thinks that Socrates grounds for the singleton {Socrates}, and not vice versa. He also thinks the same notion of grounding is present in Euthyphro cases (truthmaking being one of them, as I pointed out in chapter 1). The properties *being pious* and *being beloved by all the gods*

are coextensive, but the latter is grounded by the former, and not vice versa. These particular cases of dependency rely on various metaphysical assumptions, but they do not in any way depend upon a substantive view of truth. If Schaffer is correct that the dependency involved in truthmaking is the same sort of dependency in these other cases, then deflationists can admit truthmaking just as much as they can admit the existence Euthyphro contrasts.

We may now conclude that truthmaker theory does not compromise linguistic or conceptual deflationism. Accordingly, we may concur with Lewis in holding that “the point of mentioning truth [in our account of truthmaking] was that it allowed us to formulate the Truthmaker Principle concisely, rather than as an infinite list of claims about all manner of things” (2001b: 605).

Before moving on, it will be instructive to be absolutely clear on the dialectic at this point. I have been assuming that deflationist responses to the familiar challenges are tenable, or at the least rationally defensible. The same sorts of moves that deflationists make to meet other challenges can be applied in similar fashion to issues involved with truthmaking. If those maneuvers are respectable for other questions, they are respectable here. That said, if such maneuvers are ultimately found to be unsatisfying, then deflationism itself is an inherently unstable view, and so truthmaker theorists should stay clear. So if there are problems with the strategies I have used here to show the compatibility of truthmaking and deflationism, those problems will likely surface in the other traditional challenges to deflationism. If at the end of the day truthmaker theory and conceptual deflationism turn out to be incompatible, then it still seems that the incompatibility is not anything peculiar to truthmaker theory.

### 3.2.4. Truthmaking and metaphysical deflationism

So finally we come to metaphysical deflationism: there is no (substantive) property of truth. The thesis as it stands is fairly empty. What sense of ‘property’ is being invoked? We cannot evaluate the substance of the thesis independently of any view as to what properties are. Unfortunately, no one in the literature has offered much by way of an explanation of just what a substantive property of truth is supposed to be. Our goal is to remedy that deficit. My suggestion is that we bring to bear on the theory of truth the theory of properties that is already up and running in the domain of metaphysics. Metaphysicians have an answer to the question ‘What is a substantive property?’, and the debate over the nature of truth would benefit by attending to it.

The topic of the nature and existence of properties is as old as philosophy. Plato’s theory of forms is among the first attempts to articulate a developed theory of properties. We shall briefly survey the current philosophical landscape on properties, but we should first deal with a more humdrum notion of a property. Properties, in that sense, are just things we can attribute to objects.<sup>32</sup> If the chair is green and expensive, then it has those two properties, the property of being green and the property of being expensive. Now, as for truth, no one need deny that some sentences, propositions, statements, and beliefs are true. I have many beliefs—some are unpopular, some are complex, some are unfounded, and some are true. Since some beliefs are true, some beliefs have the property of being true. So, there is a property of truth.<sup>33</sup> What we have said here amounts to little more than saying that ‘true’ is a predicate of our language, one which we can truthfully apply to and withhold from various

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. Shoemaker 1979: “There is a broad sense of the word “property” in which there is a property corresponding to any grammatical predicate” (331).

<sup>33</sup>For some interesting issues raised by such arguments, see Hofweber 2005b.

objects. The same story could be told for ‘exists’. Some things exist; some do not. Thus, some things have the property of existence, so existence is a property.<sup>34</sup> Many of my beliefs have the property of being true, and they all have the property of existence. But so far I have said nothing intended to be philosophically controversial, or even philosophically relevant. When philosophers deny that truth is a property, or that existence is a property, they do not deny any of the truisms I have been canvassing in this paragraph. The simple reason is that we need not, and should not, read our metaphysical theories directly off of the surface grammar of our language. In the case of existence, we all know now that we should treat existential claims as quantified statements, not predicative statements (but see McGinn 2000 and Azzouni 2004). Similarly, some have argued that, despite appearances to the contrary, ‘true’ does not function in English as a predicate (Strawson 1949, Grover, Camp, and Belnap 1975). Our question is whether ascriptions of truth in English are ascriptions of a property in some *philosophical* sense. The issue is not simply whether there are things that are true, for that is beyond dispute. But it is not enough simply to say that our question instead is whether there is a “real” or a “robust” or a “substantive” or a “metaphysical” property of truth. Those sayings are too murky; what we need is an examination of the various philosophical theories that can give content to the thesis that there is no property of truth. The literature on properties is rich, extensive, and well known; as such, there is no reason not to appeal to it directly in discussing whether there is a property of truth. Once we have given the thesis of metaphysical deflationism some philosophical substance, we shall be able to investigate its truth, and its compatibility with truthmaker theory. So let us turn to a discussion of the various things it could mean for there to be no property of truth.

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. Lowe 2007, which argues that ‘is true’ is in the category of “formal ontological predicates”, which includes ‘exists’ and ‘is identical with’ (239). No such predicate is taken to correspond to a universal or set of tropes. See McGinn 2000 for an extended defense of this sort of view.

The very first philosophical debate over realism was a debate over properties. Realists admitted the existence of universals; nominalists opposed such things, denying their existence.<sup>35</sup> We can begin our discussion of properties by dividing philosophical attitudes about them into those same two camps. There are the realists, who admit the existence of universals, and there are the nominalists, who deny them. What are universals? Universals are objects that can exist multiply instantiated, and fully exist in each of their instantiations. They are the things held in common by objects that share a property. They are *universal* in that they may occupy multiple objects at the same time. If *charge* is a universal, then electrons  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are both charged in virtue of their both instantiating or partaking in *charge*. The nature of instantiation, or what it is for a universal to inhere in or attach to a particular is one of the most ancient of all metaphysical puzzles, and lies far outside our scope here.<sup>36</sup> For our purposes, we just need to think of universals as entities distinct from particulars, but that can inhere in multiple particulars. There are many different accounts of what universals are; we shall attend to some of those disagreements momentarily.

Nominalism is the view that there are no universals, that reality is exhausted by the particular. Thus it is false to claim that there are things that enjoy separate existence, and yet can inhere in multiple, distinct objects. Nominalists claim ontological parsimony as a virtue of their view. Realists and nominalists alike grant the category of the particular, but realists go on to posit the category of the universal as well, adding to their ontological inventories.

However, so the realist claims, the sacrifice to parsimony is justified by increased

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<sup>35</sup>In categorizing the debate over properties, I follow Armstrong's categorization of the philosophical landscape (e.g., in his 1978, 1989b, and 1997). Hence I identify nominalism with the denial of the existence of universals, not with the denial of "abstract" (better: non spatio-temporal) objects, in the Quinean sense. The former usage is more traditional; the latter understanding of "nominalism" is more relevant to discussions of naturalism than to the existence of properties.

<sup>36</sup>For a fine contemporary, but historically informed exploration of the nature of predication (and its connection to truth), see Davidson 2005.

explanatory power. And so what we have here is a classic form of metaphysical debate. The realist charges that the nominalist cannot account for all the facts (Armstrong 1978, 1980). The nominalist replies that he can, or charges *tu quoque* that positing entities is no explanation at all (Devitt 1980). Our job here is not to focus on the problem of universals *per se*, but to see what implications the different views on universals have for metaphysical deflationism.

In addition to distinguishing between realism and nominalism, we may further divide both camps into their extreme and moderate versions. Extreme realism is a view that Armstrong attributes to Plato, and is the view that universals exist independently of their being instantiated. Plato's forms do not exist in the natural world—they have their own realm of being. Thus, the forms are *transcendent*. Moderate realism, which Armstrong attributes (though somewhat hesitantly) to Aristotle and ultimately endorses himself, is the view that universals exist, but can exist only when instantiated. Thus, there are no uninstantiated universals. All universals are therefore *immanent*. On the moderate view, universals are located in space and time; they are located wherever and whenever it is that the particulars in which they inhere are located. Note that realism, in either its extreme or its moderate form, is not committed to the thesis that there is a universal corresponding to every predicate. That some things are mauve does not entail, for the realist, that there is a universal *mauve*. The question of what universals there are must be taken up by the usual philosophical and empirical means.

We may identify moderate nominalism with the thesis that, while there are no universals, there are tropes. Tropes in philosophy are understood as particularized properties. They are individual, particular objects, and thus not universal. So while  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are both

charged, they are not charged in virtue of some single thing. Rather,  $E_1$  is charged because there is a charge trope  $C_{E_1}$  that belongs to  $E_1$ , and a second charge trope  $C_{E_2}$  that belongs to  $E_2$ .  $C_{E_1}$  and  $C_{E_2}$  are distinct entities, though there are various things we might say about them and their relationship to one another. For instance, we might hold that they both belong to the same class of  $C$  tropes, which may or may not be a “natural” class (in the lingo of Lewis 1983), and that they may or may not belong to the class in virtue of some (perhaps brute) kind of resemblance. Tropes are posited to do the metaphysical work of universals without compromising a monistic ontology of particulars. The view is moderate because it recognizes, along with realism, the need for some entity to play a role in the metaphysics of properties. There are of course a variety of trope theories available; we shall not delve into the details.

Finally, we can understand extreme nominalism as the denial that there are universals or tropes, or, more generally, as the claim that there is no need to posit entities at all in order to offer a satisfactory account of the metaphysics of properties (e.g., Davidson 2005). So whereas all the other theories have distinct entities to point to (universals or tropes) when explaining why  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are both charged (and how they share something in common), the extreme nominalist can say at most that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are both charged because they both belong to the class of charged things. But it is not the case that  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are charged in virtue of any *thing*, particular or universal. Some extreme nominalists may wish to distinguish some classes from others. Lewis admits that some classes are more natural than others, where what it is to be natural is taken as a primitive (1983). One might, for instance, hold that the collection of electrons form a perfectly natural class, while the collection of grue objects do not. The most extreme nominalist of all will deny that any class is any more natural than any other, or perhaps deny altogether that there are classes (Goodman 1956).

The landscape, then, is divided into realism and nominalism, each of which can be divided into moderate and extreme versions. Accordingly, we may isolate a number of these one might hold with respect to the property of truth, if it exists. We can call these the various accounts of just what metaphysical substantivism of truth can be:

(**MS<sub>1</sub>**) There is a transcendent universal *truth*.

(**MS<sub>2</sub>**) There is an immanent universal *truth*.

(**MS<sub>3</sub>**) There is a resemblance class of truth tropes.

(**MS<sub>4</sub>**) There is a natural class of truths.

(**MS<sub>5</sub>**) There are truths.

First let me make some simple observations. There are, of course, many versions of each of our four kinds of philosophical views on properties. We could articulate even more specific theses that give more precise specifications of what the property of truth is, and then investigate their truth. Doing so would bog us down in the dirty details of the philosophy of properties, and it is not our ambition to consider every possible view of properties that has been offered. Nevertheless, it is important that we disambiguate to some degree the claim that there is a property of truth. We shall have to be satisfied with this medium level of specificity.

Next, notice that there is no denying **MS<sub>5</sub>**. In fact, denying it is self-undermining. If, per *reductio*, there are no truths, then it is true that there are no truths. But then there is a truth, and so we have reduced “truth nihilism” to absurdity. So while even the most extreme nominalist must grant **MS<sub>5</sub>**, he rejects the others for their false metaphysical posits.

Finally, note that we can distinguish between rejecting certain of these theses on grounds simply due to one’s views regarding the theory of properties, and on grounds

specifically to do with truth. One can reject the first four and still be a Platonic realist about universals. But if one is already committed on the problem of universals, that commitment will limit his choices when it comes to the metaphysical status of truth. The moderate realist, for instance, will reject **MS<sub>1</sub>** and **MS<sub>3</sub>** simply in virtue of his committed view on properties. (**MS<sub>4</sub>** may come for free if he accepts any of the other three first theses.) Whether he also rejects **MS<sub>2</sub>** will depend on his specific attitudes about truth.

I have taken the time to delve into the metaphysical debate over properties precisely because I think the question of just what it is to be a substantive property has too long been skirted around in the literature on deflationism. Our question is whether such a thesis is compatible with truthmaker theory, and we cannot address that question until we give it some content. To be a metaphysical deflationist, then, is to reject all of **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>**. To think that truth is a metaphysically substantive property is to think either that the class of true things forms a natural class, or that there is some truth universal or class of truth tropes. One helpful way to think about metaphysical substantivism is that it is the view that truth is a *sparse* property. Many philosophers accept that there is more to objects sharing a feature than merely their falling under the same predicate. Green objects resemble one another in a way that grue objects do not. As a result, they distinguish between the *sparse* and *abundant* properties. The sparse properties are those that account for the genuine resemblances between objects. Abundant properties, by contrast, can be shared between objects without bestowing any resemblance upon them. There need not be any genuine feature held in common between all the objects within a three mile radius of Obama's nose, though there are features held in common between all samples of gold. What **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>** share is the view that truth is among the sparse properties. Everyone, presumably, can grant that truth is a

property in the abundant sense. In the next section, I shall argue that truthmaker theory offers a very powerful argument in favor of metaphysical deflationism, and hence against **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>**. But our current question is simply whether metaphysical deflationism is consistent with truthmaker theory.

Let us first assume a metaphysics of universals. Suppose even that one believes that the truthmaking relation is a universal (even though it is not). One would not then be forced to conclude that *truth* is a universal. Given all the facts about truthmaking—that is, given all the instances of the truthmaking relation—we would settle all the facts about the truths. At least, we would if maximalism were true—so let’s suppose that it is for the sake of convenience.<sup>37</sup> For example, suppose that there are two instances of the truthmaking relation: A makes true B, and C makes true D. It follows automatically that B is true, and that D is true. Here ‘is true’ is understood as a mere relational predicate. A truth-bearer satisfies the truth predicate just in case it stands in the truthmaking relation to something else. What is important to note is that all the “ontological work” being done here is performed by the truthmaking universal. There is no need to posit a second universal of truth. To employ the controversial language of supervenience, we could say that all the truth facts supervene on the truthmaking facts, which, *ex hypothesi*, we are taking to be more fundamental ontologically.

Suppose now that there is no truthmaking universal. Such is Armstrong’s actual view, since he thinks that no internal relation (including truthmaking) is a universal. To account for relations, we posit universals only when the terms of the relata are insufficient for grounding the relation. Given both a truth, say, that *a* exists, and an object, *a*, there is no further thing

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<sup>37</sup>Note that if even *maximalist* truthmaking is consistent with deflationism, then surely non-maximalist truthmaking is as well.

we need to add to our ontology to guarantee that *a* and *that a exists* stand in the truthmaking relation. For it is impossible to imagine a world possessed of *a* and yet have it be a world where *that a exists* turns out to be false. All the truthmaking relations are guaranteed to obtain, once the facts about what the truth-bearers are and what exists are settled. Marian David summarizes Armstrong's attitude with the following slogan: "Be serious about truthmakers but not so serious about truth and truthmaking" (2005: 147). If deflationism about truth is taken to be the rejection of any universal of truth and truthmaking, then Armstrong is in that sense a deflationist. But such deflationism is no obstacle to robust truthmaker theory.

Consider next the potential deflationist thesis that there are no truth tropes. Someone might hold the view that while there is no universal *truth*—no single thing possessed by all and only true things—there are truth tropes. All the particular instances of the truth tropes would then form a resemblance class. On such a view, we can call the truth of 'Snow is white' 'T<sub>1</sub>', the truth of 'Grass is green' 'T<sub>2</sub>', and so forth. T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub> are distinct entities, though they resemble each other and hence belong to a resemblance class including all and only the truth tropes. I do not know of anyone who holds such a view about truth, and its rejection poses no problem for truthmaker theorists. For one thing, Armstrong is a nihilist about truth tropes (and all tropes more generally), but that interferes in no way with his truthmaking ambitions. Even those who embrace trope theory and truthmaker theory do not turn to any truth trope to fund their ontological ambitions (Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Lowe 2007, Cameron 2008a). Suppose it is true that *a* is *F*. To find a truthmaker for that truth, truthmaker theorists do not posit a *truth* trope; rather, they posit an *F* trope. The truthmaker for '*a* is *F*' is *F<sub>a</sub>*, an *F* trope belonging to *a* that falls under the resemblance class of all and

only tropes that belong to F things. There is no need to appeal to an additional class of truth tropes—truths are true in virtue of tropes, sure, but truth tropes in particular are an extraneous and unnecessary ontological addition. So not only is truthmaking perfectly consistent with there being no truth tropes, truthmaker theory (even when fueled by trope theory) undermines the need for positing any class of truth tropes. (This argument will be developed in greater detail below.)

Truthmaking is consistent, then, with there being no universal *truth* or any truth tropes. I do not see any trouble for the truthmaker theorist in denying **MS<sub>4</sub>**, either. Nowhere in the truthmaking literature does anyone suggest that truth must be understood as a natural kind. Even Lewis, who adopts the natural properties framework, gives no suggestion that he thinks truth is among the privileged properties. Besides, there are independent reasons for rejecting it that we shall survey below. The upshot, then, is that metaphysical deflationism—the rejection of **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>**—is perfectly compatible with truthmaker theory. It is easy to see why. All the “truth facts” supervene upon all the “truthmaking facts”. And all the truthmaking facts supervene upon the objects in the world. So there need be no universals underlying the property of being true, or the truthmaking relation. So truthmaker theorists *need not* reject metaphysical deflationism, for it is no obstacle to truthmaking theory. As Armstrong’s work shows, the truthmaker theorist is interested in ontology, and in offering an ambitious metaphysics concerned with what kind of ontology is needed to ground the truths that we accept. To do that ontological work, truthmaker theorists offer a full metaphysical system; one needs a robust ontology to fund truthmaker theory, not simply an appeal to a universal or trope underlying the truth predicate.

Deflationists have long said that there is nothing shared in common between truths. ‘Snow is white’ and ‘Grass is green’ are both true, but not because they share a common property. The truthmaker theorist agrees wholeheartedly. Each truth needs individual attention, for there is no single thing (like a truth universal or truth trope) that makes truths true. Recall Armstrong’s admonition (via David 2005) that we be serious about truthmakers, not about truth and truthmaking. Hence, serious advocates of truthmaking ought to agree with the deflationist’s suspicion about there being a robust metaphysics of *truth*. In doing so, one is not thereby abandoning any robust metaphysics that underlies the *truths* that we accept. Deflationism about truth, as we explored earlier, should not be understood as being tantamount to a rejection of metaphysics as a worthwhile philosophical enterprise. As a result, deflationism about truth in no way seems compromised by a robust commitment to truthmaker theory. There may be good reasons for doubting the truth of deflationism, but truthmaking *per se* is not among them.

### 3.3. Truthmaking against substantive truth

I have now argued that truthmaker theory and deflationism about truth form a consistent pair. That conclusion is less striking once we recognize that truthmaker theory itself is not any kind of theory of truth. Nevertheless, I have gone to great length to show that the two theories are compatible. In this section, I want to argue for what is perhaps a more shocking thesis: truthmaker theory actually undermines substantive theories of truth. Not only is (a certain kind of) deflationism consistent with truthmaker theory, it is actually the only rationally compelling view about the metaphysics of truth to which the truthmaker theorist should subscribe. In the last chapter we saw how truthmaker theory undermines the

motivation for accepting correspondence theories by better accounting for the basic motivations that favor correspondence accounts over their competitors. The argument of this section has even wider implications: *any* theory of truth that posits a metaphysically robust property of truth is undermined by truthmaker theory. Hence, I shall be arguing that adopting truthmaker theory gives us sufficient reason for rejecting **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>** above. Truth is not among the sparse properties.

As always, I adhere to methodological neutrality, and do not wish to tackle the problem of universals on its own terms, or even take a stand. Our object is to argue in favor of metaphysical deflationism, so as to show that there is no metaphysically substantive property of truth, regardless of how we might understand that thesis. Accordingly, I take our present task to be the one of refuting **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>**. Metaphysical deflationism is the view that there is no substantive property of truth, which we now can take to be a denial that truth is any of the various things philosophers mean when they discuss the nature of properties.<sup>38</sup> Now, it should be evident that if we adopt the most extreme form of nominalism, then metaphysical deflationism is secure. If there is no metaphysical notion of a property at all, then *a fortiori* there is no metaphysical notion of a property of truth. So we could argue for metaphysical deflationism by arguing for extreme nominalism about properties (*sans* any account of naturalness). But that is not our project. Thinking directly about truth can lead us to reject theses **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>**; we do not need to import any controversial assumptions about the metaphysics of properties. Let us turn, then, to the refutation of our four theses. The argument will run in two different directions. First, I shall argue that there is no theoretical need to posit any such substantive property of truth. Doing so is gratuitous. Then I shall

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<sup>38</sup>Cf. O’Leary-Hawthorne and Price 1996: 278 on “substantial” or “thick” truth, and Azzouni’s notion of “metaphysical truth deflationism” (2006).

argue that even if we do posit such a property, we are led to some disastrous metaphysical conclusions.

### 3.3.1. No need for *truth*

The first step to arguing against metaphysical substantivism involves appreciating the *truthmaking* role that properties play. Those who embrace the existence of universals or tropes do so not only because such things account for the resemblances between objects, but also because they are able to serve as truthmakers for contingent predicative truths. Suppose, for example, that Smith is six feet tall. Smith himself is not a truthmaker for the truth that Smith is six feet tall, since the existence of Smith himself does not guarantee that the proposition is true. It is possible for Smith to exist and not be six feet tall. Something else is needed to account for the truth of the claim. Someone who accepted universals would hold that what makes it true is a state of affairs—the compound object composed of both Smith and the *six feet tall* universal (e.g., Armstrong 1997). Someone who accepted tropes would hold that what makes it true is a particular six feet tall trope that uniquely belongs to Smith (e.g., Lowe 2007).

Notice, then, the truthmaking powers that belong to tropes and universals. For any object  $x$  that instantiates some universal  $F$ , it will be true that  $x$  is  $F$ , and the state of affairs composed of  $x$  and  $F$  will make that claim true. For any object  $x$  that possesses a trope of type  $T$ , it will be true that  $x$  is  $T$ , and the trope will make that claim true. Now suppose that truth is a metaphysically substantive property, such that there is a universal *truth* or collection of truth tropes. Any time a truth bearer is true, it will instantiate that universal, or possess a truth trope. Just as all green things instantiate *green*, or possess resembling green tropes, all true

things—so says the substantivist about *truth*—instantiate *truth*, or possess resembling truth tropes.

We may now notice how the substantivist about truth has abundant truthmaking resources for contingent predications. For ease of exposition, suppose there are propositions. The proposition <Smith is six feet tall> is true, and true in virtue of either a six feet tall trope that belongs to Smith, or the state of affairs composed of Smith and the universal *six feet tall*. But the proposition itself instantiates *truth* (thereby creating a new state of affairs), or possesses a truth trope. Those entities themselves are also truthmakers for the proposition, as their existence guarantees the truth of the proposition. The realist now has two states of affairs that serve to make the proposition true (Smith's bearing *six feet tall*, and the proposition's bearing *truth*), just as the moderate nominalist has two tropes available to serve as truthmakers (a six feet tall trope, and a truth trope).

Now, it is no objection to a view that it provides redundant truthmakers for truths. There is no one-one correspondence between truths and truthmakers. What is important to realize now is how the two truthmakers available to the substantivist are *distinct* entities. Two objects are distinct just in case the existence of at least one does not depend upon the existence of the other. Two objects are *fully distinct* just in case neither depends on the existence of the other for its existence. Fully distinct objects are distinct objects between which no necessary connections obtain. Suppose, for example, that some particular *a* contingently instantiates the universal *F*. The state of affairs (*a, F*) composed of the two objects is a distinct existence from its components *a* and *F* because its components could exist without the state of affairs existing. Such would be the case were *a* to exist but not be *F*, though something else was. But though (*a, F*) is distinct from both *a* and *F*, it is not fully

distinct from them. States of affairs are necessarily connected to their components:  $(a, F)$  depends upon its constituents, for it cannot exist unless  $a$  and  $F$  both do.<sup>39</sup>

Consider now the two truthmakers that the realist has available for  $\langle \text{Smith is six feet tall} \rangle$ .<sup>40</sup> One is a state of affairs composed of Smith and *six feet tall*. The other is a state of affairs composed of the proposition and *truth*. I contend that these two objects are most plausibly understood as being fully distinct entities.<sup>41</sup> As I shall now argue, they do not depend upon one another for their existence.

If there are necessary connections between the two states of affairs, then those connections ought to be traceable to other necessary connections obtaining between their components. Otherwise we will be forced to take the connection to be brute. Consider a familiar case of necessarily connected states of affairs: imagine a length of wire  $L$  that instantiates the two universals *made of copper* and *electrically conductive*. The state of affairs of  $L$ 's being made of copper is necessarily connected to the state of affairs of  $L$ 's being electrically conductive. What explains the necessary connection between the two states of affairs is the necessary connection between the two universals: conductivity necessarily accompanies copper. That sort of connection is not to be found in our case. The two universals—*truth* and *six feet tall*—do not depend upon each other for their existence; they're just separate, unique universals. They are instantiated by very different kinds of objects: very few, if any, true truth-bearers are six feet tall! Further, the connection we are looking for cannot be accounted for by finding a connection between universals, because we don't have

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<sup>39</sup>It is just these sorts of necessary connections between distinct existences that lead Lewis (1992, 2001b) to find fault with Armstrong's realism.

<sup>40</sup>Exactly parallel marks apply for the moderate nominalist here.

<sup>41</sup>Similarly, I contend that the *truth* trope belonging to  $\langle \text{Smith is six feet tall} \rangle$  is a distinct existence from the *six feet tall* trope belonging to Smith.

one single object instantiating two universals. We are trying to account for a connection between a proposition and a certain universal on the one hand, and a person and a very different universal on the other. Our two states of affairs don't even share a common component, and so accounting for their mutual dependence is all the more difficult.

The usual channels for accounting for necessary connections between states of affairs do not seem open to the realist about *truth*. Even so, it might still be thought that, nevertheless, the states of affairs themselves are necessarily connected. The view is that the proposition <Smith is six feet tall> cannot bind to *truth* unless Smith himself binds to *six feet tall*. One might just bite the bullet here and accept the necessary connection as brute, and thereby forswear giving any account of the connection. After all, states of affairs themselves may well involve some sort of brute connection to their components, so perhaps there is no more harm in admitting some further necessary connections between different states of affairs.

While such a view may be defensible, it does come at a cost. Accepting that there are necessary connections between distinct existences is tantamount to restricting the free recombination of distinct existences. When two universals are very different in their nature, they ought to be able to freely recombine, irrespective of what the other is doing. Other universals like *green* and *red* may well impose constraints on one another—objects that are green can't be red. But such failures of recombination are due to the intrinsic incompatibilities in the universals. It's not obvious that the same can be said for *truth* and *six feet tall*. As we've already seen, they don't even tend to instantiate the same kinds of objects.

Failures of free recombination, of course, worry some philosophers—Humeans and Lewisians, for example—more than others. But even those who are untroubled by the

presence of necessary connections between distinct existences must recognize that the substantivist about truth takes on an extra explanatory burden that the deflationist does not. The substantivist posits the existence of two very different states of affairs that are composed of very different sorts of things, and holds that these two distinct states of affairs nevertheless necessitate the existence of each other. If a view posits the brute existence of necessary connections between distinct existences, it incurs a theoretical cost. Such views impose greater structure on the world—things of type X can't exist unless different things of type Y also exist.

Such costs can indeed be justified. Armstrong (1983), for example, posits the existence of necessary connections between distinct universals in order to give an adequate account of the laws of nature. Further, as we have already seen, Armstrong grants the existence of states of affairs—despite their own inherent necessary connection to their components—because he employs them as truthmakers for contingent predications. So positing such necessary connections is not in and of itself fatal to a view. Still, positing brute necessary connections should not be done lightly, and should be done only to serve a greater theoretical purpose. The very same can be said for positing entities (or a notion of naturalness) at all with respect to the metaphysics of properties. Universals, tropes, and natural properties are not posited without cause; one need not believe that for every predicate there is a corresponding universal or set of tropes, or that every property is natural. Not every property deserves to be sparse. What reasons, then, can justify these various metaphysical posits, such as universals, tropes, naturalness, states of affairs, or necessary connections between them?

The answer is threefold. Here is David Lewis, describing Armstrong's moderate realism: "universals are sparse. There are the universals that there must be to ground the

objective resemblances and the causal powers of things, and there is no reason to believe in any more” (1983: 345). Lewis here identifies two of the sources of justification for metaphysical positing in the theory of properties. We posit universals (or tropes or naturalness) when we need them to account for the genuine resemblances between objects. What separates the collection of green objects from the collection of grue objects is that the former all share a single universal (*green*), which cannot be said for the various grue objects.

We also posit universals (or tropes or naturalness) when we need them to account for the causal properties of objects. The thought here is that objects have their causal powers in virtue of the properties they enjoy. The sparse properties are, in Armstrong’s phrase, “the ontologically significant properties of objects, those in terms of which the world’s work is done” (2004: 17). Armstrong often refers to the “Eleatic Principle”, according to which nothing exists except that which has causal powers (e.g., 1997: 41-43; see Oddie 1982 for discussion). Being *massive* or *charged* or *conductive* are the sorts of properties that account for the causal order of the world; it is these properties, and not *being three feet from Obama* or *being either in Alaska or Madagascar* that figure into the causal laws of nature.

A third and final reason for positing universals and tropes involves, as before, their use as truthmakers. Objects and their properties, whether understood in terms of universals or tropes, are needed to serve as the ontological grounds for the truths about the world. Truths are true in virtue of the existence of both objects and their properties.

There are three sources of justification, then, for positing that a particular property belongs among the sparse properties. The sparse properties are those that account for the genuine resemblances between objects, have causal powers, and are needed as truthmakers. We should posit such properties (and any necessary connections between them) only if doing

so serves those needs. Our next question to consider is whether treating truth as a sparse property will fulfill any of these metaphysical purposes.

First consider the topic of resemblance. Sparse properties are those that account for genuine resemblances between objects. Objects resemble one another in virtue of instantiating the same universal, possessing resembling tropes, or belonging to the same natural class. Now, not all classes exhibit any real resemblance—such is supposed to be the distinction between the class of green objects and the class of grue objects. Our question is whether the truths are more like the green things or the grue things. Notice just how diverse is the collection of truths. It's true that snow is white, that Obama is president, that hobbits don't exist, and that if I were to drop a piece of chalk it would fall to the floor. The class of truths is one remarkably heterogeneous collection. Indeed, each truth seems to be its own individual affair. The proposition that snow is white is true in virtue of snow's being white, the proposition that Obama is president is true in virtue of Obama's being president, and so on. The idea on hand here is one familiar to deflationists—the truth of <Snow is white> does not “consist in the same thing” as the truth of <Obama is president>. Sure, they “resemble” one another in that they are both true, but the resemblance stops there. They are both true, but for entirely separate reasons. The shared greenness of two things, by contrast, may well admit of a common explanation, due to a genuine property shared by both. The class of truths, it seems, is a great candidate for being a perfectly *unnatural* class. If so, there is no need to promote truth to the status of a sparse property on the basis of shared resemblances between truths, for there are none.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Azzouni writes that ‘true’ belongs to the set of “words that needn't even be seen as candidates for being ‘natural-kind’ terms” (2010: 89).

It also seems unlikely that anyone would posit truth to serve any genuine causal role. We may posit *mass* and *charge* so that they may discharge their causal duties, but *truth* seems to be an altogether different beast. It is strange to think that truth would be the sort of thing that contributes to the causal order of the world studied by empirical science. By what mechanism would *truth* interact with the other universals in order to bring about various effects?<sup>43</sup> Why does *truth* not figure into any physical laws or equations?

Still, it may seem natural to make causal judgments involving truth, as in ‘The truth of my beliefs caused me to ace my exam’. Deflationists have a metaphysically innocuous account of what is being said here, and it doesn’t involve a causally active truth property.<sup>44</sup> Suppose the exam has a single question: which U.S. president was succeeded by his own predecessor? Because I believe that Benjamin Harrison was succeeded by his own predecessor, that belief in part causes my hand to write the answer, which in turn causes the instructor to give me full credit. What is crucial is that I believe that Benjamin Harrison was succeeded by his own predecessor, and that Benjamin Harrison was indeed succeeded by his own predecessor. Nowhere are we forced to posit a causally active universal *truth* to account for my success. The appeal to truth in the initial causal judgment is nothing but another instance of the useful anaphoric and abbreviatory features of ‘truth’ and ‘true’. Rather than saying that my belief that Benjamin Harrison was succeeded by his own predecessor when Benjamin Harrison was indeed succeeded by his own predecessor caused me to ace the exam,

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Levin 1984: 126, O’Leary-Hawthorne and Price 1996: 278, and McGinn 2000: 108. Damnjanovic 2005 argues that given the account of causal-explanatory properties defended by Jackson and Pettit 1990a and 1990b, deflationists might be committed to the view that even if truth is a logical property, it may nonetheless be a causal-explanatory property.

<sup>44</sup>See Williams 1986 and chapter 3 of Horwich 1990 for the kind of deflationary account of such explanatory demands that I am upholding, and Field 1986 and Kitcher 2001 and 2002 for criticism. For more on the “success” argument against deflationism, see Putnam 1978, Horwich 1982, Levin 1984, Leeds 1995, and Damnjanovic 2005.

I can abbreviate and say that it's the truth of my belief that caused my academic success. The generalizing feature of 'truth' becomes even more apparent in cases where I need to appeal to several of my true beliefs, rather than just one, in accounting for some particular practical success. Assuming the case is typical, even if we do appeal to truth in certain causal judgments, doing so only reveals the familiar logical and linguistic functions of 'truth'; such judgments do not push us into thinking that there is a universal *truth* beholden with causal powers.<sup>45</sup>

We do not need to posit a universal *truth*, then, in order to play some indispensable causal role. After all, truth does not seem to enter into our best empirical theories, and no laws of nature employ it. However, truth does seem to play a role in other laws, namely, the laws of logic. And just as certain properties entering into causal laws gives us reason to posit universals corresponding to them, so too might we think there is a truth universal by virtue of its figuring into logical laws.<sup>46</sup> But again, the fact that the laws of logic involve truth does not show that the laws are *about* truth, or that they require a notion of truth that evades deflationary analysis. Such logical uses of truth were front and center of Quine's deflationary analysis of the logical functions of the truth predicate (1970).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>It seems that other causal judgments that involve truth can be handled similarly. The judgment 'The truth of scientific theories causes them to succeed' can be analyzed in typical deflationary manner. The key is to notice that 'the truth of scientific theories' is always shorthand for 'that scientific theories entail that there is gravity, and there is gravity, or that scientific theories entail that there are electrons, and there are electrons', and so forth. The thought behind the original judgment is that it is the specific content of true theories—rather than the content of false theories—which causes practical success. Hence, theory  $T_1$  (which includes, say, a true theory of gravity) causes successful prediction of planetary orbits where  $T_2$  (which includes a false theory of gravity) does not. What is thought to do all the causing in the judgment is the actual causal content of the theory, not any specific causal power belonging to *truth*. After all, no scientific theory (at least none that I've ever heard of) employs a causally active property *truth*.

<sup>46</sup>I owe this helpful suggestion to Matt Kotzen.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Horwich 1990: 75-77.

Finally we come to truthmaking: does promoting truth into a sparse property provide us with any needed truthmaking resources? As we saw above, positing a universal *truth* or set of truth tropes provides us with *redundant* truthmakers, not useful ones. Many truthmaker theorists rely on universals, states of affairs, and tropes in order to provide truthmakers; what they do not do is posit universals, states of affairs, and tropes specifically to do with truth. As before, the state of affairs of Smith's being six feet tall and Smith's six feet tall trope are perfectly adequate truthmakers for <Smith is six feet tall>. We do not need another state of affairs or trope involving truth to properly ground the truth of the proposition. Other kinds of propositions do not call for a sparse truth property, either. Existential propositions like <There are penguins> don't require truth tropes or states of affairs; they just require penguins. Negative existential propositions, as we know, raise notorious truthmaker questions: what makes it true that there are no hobbits? Perhaps there are negative facts (Russell 1985), absences (Martin 1996), or one giant totality fact (Armstrong 2004) that make it true, or perhaps it doesn't have any truthmaker at all (Lewis 2001b). Regardless of who is correct here, no one thinks that what we need is a sparse property of truth to bind to the negative existential proposition.

Initially, the following line of reasoning might have seemed correct. All electrons share something in common, for all electrons are charged. Therefore they share a common universal: *charge*. Electrons are charged in virtue of their each instantiating the universal *charge*. Similarly, all true propositions (say) share something in common, for all true propositions are true. Therefore they share a common universal: *truth*. Propositions are true in virtue of their instantiating the universal *truth*. Further, what makes it true that  $E_1$  is charged is that  $E_1$  instantiates *charge*, and what makes it true that proposition  $P_1$  is true is that

$P_1$  instantiates *truth*.<sup>48</sup> The cases seem exactly parallel. But we are now in a position to see the mistake. Truth need not be a property of propositions in the way that charge is a property of electrons. When propositions are true, they are true in virtue of their truthmakers. When electrons are charged, they are charged in virtue of their instantiating the universal *charge*. The cases are actually quite different; only the latter suggests the need for a universal.

To suppose that we need a universal *truth* to account for the truth of propositions is to make a common mistake, namely, to think that predications of truth add substance to a claim. It is true that there are penguins if and only if there are penguins. That triviality, it is often said, is countenanced by all theories of truth. Any truthmaker for the right-hand side of the biconditional, then, will be a truthmaker for the left-hand side.<sup>49</sup> But it is evident that any old penguin is sufficient to guarantee the truth of the right-hand side. And so it guarantees the truth of the left-hand side as well. The left-hand side, despite its predication of truth, actually posits no additional metaphysical substance beyond what is already posited by the right-hand side. If it did, it would be impossible to infer *it is true that p* from *that p*, which is a perfectly valid form of inference (as is its converse). Since penguins alone sufficiently account for the truth of <There are penguins>, we do not need to say that there is, in addition, a universal

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<sup>48</sup>This line of thought is readily apparent in Lynch 2009. On Lynch's pluralist view, truth is a property that can be multiply realized. In domain A, propositions are true by virtue of having the property "corresponding with the facts", whereas in domain B, propositions are true by virtue of having the property "superwarranted". The language of being true in virtue of having one of the various truth properties can be found throughout the work. Lynch does not give an account of what he means by 'property'.

<sup>49</sup>Supposing, at least, that the T-sentences are necessary. I happen to think that some T-sentences are clearly contingent (namely, those generated by the sentential version  $T_3$ ), while some are clearly necessary (namely, those generated by the statement version  $T_1$  and the propositional version  $T_2$ ). The T-sentence in this paragraph goes the way of the necessary versions. The only contingency that arises in T-sentences is due to the fact that words can change their meaning in different possible worlds, and nothing more. Relatedly, this means that truthmakers for sentences may be more complicated than the truthmakers for the propositions they express. For if some sentence S expresses some true proposition P, it seems that the truthmaker for S will include whatever the truthmaker is for P combined with whatever makes it true that S expresses P. This subtlety can largely be ignored for our purposes.

*truth* which the proposition instantiates. Penguins handle the metaphysical labor all by themselves.

What we have here is little more than the familiar recognition that “Ramsey’s ladder” is horizontal (see Blackburn 1998). It may appear that there is a metaphysical ladder to climb between *that p*, *that p is true*, *that p is really*, *objectively true*, *that p is true in the eye of God*, and so forth. But all those claims are no more substantive than the original claim *that p*. It is a mistake to suppose that in climbing the ladder we have gained any ontological altitude. The view from the top is the same as the view from the bottom. Because the ladder is horizontal,<sup>50</sup> we do not need additional truthmakers for any rung of the ladder besides the one holding up the original rung for *that p*.

So far, we have seen that if a proposition has a truthmaker, then that truthmaker by itself is sufficient to account for the proposition’s truth. There is no reason to suppose that all truths are true in virtue of their instantiating a single thing, as is the case with other shared properties. Rather, each truth is different.<sup>51</sup> As deflationists have long urged, the truth of *that snow is white* does not “consist” in the same thing as the truth of *that grass is green*. The former is true in virtue of snow’s being white, the latter in virtue of grass’s being green. It is a mistake to look for something in common between them. Now, if both have truthmakers,

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<sup>50</sup>Which is not to say, *contra* Blackburn, that the ladder is lying on the ground (1998: 78). If a truth’s “lying on the ground” amounts to its not having any ontological or metaphysical substance, then nothing about the equivalence between *that p* and *that p is true* should lead us to think that both claims are devoid of metaphysical substance. (I do not know if that is what Blackburn means by the ladder lying on the ground, but I suspect he has something like that in mind when he speaks of truths coming “on the cheap” or “for free”, given the deflationist view. See Zangwill 1992: 163.) The correct insight to draw is that *that p* and *that p is true* have *exactly the same* metaphysical and ontological commitments, however substantive those may be. Deflating *that p is true* down to *that p* does not show that *that p* is a metaphysical lightweight. Try this instance: Lewis’s claim that there is a pluriverse of concrete possible worlds (1986). My suspicion is that those who think that there is any easy inference from deflationism about truth to anti-realism are conflating the horizontal nature of the ladder (which is correct) with the ladder’s lying on the ground (which is open to question).

<sup>51</sup>Recall the view endorsed by Lowe (2007: 259) that ‘is true’ is nothing but a formal ontological predicate. Horwich holds a similar view (1990: 38). Compare: do all existing things share something in common, namely, the universal *existence*?

then we can say that they both share the property of “having a truthmaker”. But recall that we showed earlier that the truthmaking relation requires no corresponding universal. The terms of the relation are sufficient to guarantee that the relation obtains, and thus we need not posit any universal to ground the relation.

Further, the term ‘truthmaker’ is just like ‘truth’ in that it deceptively suggests that there is something in common between all truthmakers. The two truths *that there are electrons* and *that there are penguins* both have truthmakers, sure, but those are, for example,  $E_1$  and some individual penguin. There is very little in common between electrons and penguins. So while both are truthmakers (everything, recall, is a truthmaker), what we really have are a “there-being-electrons-maker” on the one hand, and a “there-being-penguins-maker” on the other. The common term ‘truthmaker’ glosses over the differences between truthmakers, just as ‘truth’ glosses over the differences between truths.<sup>52</sup> Truthmaker theorists, then, subscribe to the same “piecemeal” approach to truths that deflationists have long advocated. Each truth has its own subject matter; the truth of each individual truth is a matter of what that truth is about, and nothing else. There need not be any metaphysical overlap between truths with different subject matter of what it is in which their truth consists. As a result, we do not need to turn to any universal *truth* to provide a common subject matter, for there simply is none.

I have so far been more or less assuming so far that the universal *truth* is not needed to perform any truthmaking labor. The truth that there are penguins is made true by penguins, and the truth that electrons are charged is made true by electrons, *charge*, and/or whatever else one might think is needed to serve as a predicative truthmaker (a state of affairs, trope, object under a counterpart relation, or what have you). Ordinarily, truths are not themselves

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<sup>52</sup>Many thanks to John Roberts, to whom I owe this keen observation.

about truth, and so we wouldn't even think to look to *truth* as a truthmaker. Even in many cases where 'true' and 'truth' appear in true sentences, we should not turn to *truth* as a truthmaker. 'There are electrons' and 'It is true that there are electrons' are both true in virtue of the various actual electrons; that 'true' appears in the latter adds no extra incentive for thinking that it is made true in part by a universal *truth*. Similarly, the true claim 'There is some truth to Kant's views on metaphysics' is true in virtue of whatever it is in virtue of which Kant's various true metaphysical claims are true. If it is true that space and time are pure forms of intuition, and that what makes that claim true is X, then X also makes true the generic claim 'There is some truth to Kant's views on metaphysics' (together with whatever makes it true that Kant said that space and time are pure forms of intuition). In general, wherever traditional deflationists have given an account of the role of 'true' and 'truth' in our language, we can borrow that account to show how such appearances do not generate any extra metaphysical burdens when it comes to truthmaking.

Still, there are cases that challenge deflationary accounts of truth. Consider, for example, the claim *that to assert is to present as true*. Here we have a truth that, it has been argued, evades typical deflationary analysis (Bar-On and Simmons 2007). Such examples, as we have seen, put pressure on *conceptual deflationism*, the view that truth is not conceptually connected to other notions beyond its role as a disquotational, denominalizing, and generalizing device. But even if such claims pose a problem for conceptual deflationism, it does not follow that they place similar pressure on metaphysical deflationism. Still, the best examples, it seems, for undermining metaphysical deflationism are the same as those that attempt to undermine conceptual deflationism. In our example—that to assert is to present as

true—what we have, I believe, is a conceptual truth, and probably an analytic one at that.<sup>53</sup>

We are offering an analysis (or elucidation, or definition, or what have you) of the concept of assertion by making use of the concept of truth. Now, it is a familiar dictum that conceptual truths are true in virtue of the meaning of their constituents. That bachelors are unmarried is true in virtue of the fact that the concept BACHELOR includes in some sense the concept UNMARRIED. Whatever else they are or do, our concepts license us to make various inferences. From ‘X is a bachelor’ we may infer ‘X is unmarried’. Whatever concepts are (and I have no firm view on the matter), they guarantee that such inferences are valid. Our concepts being what they are, then, it is true that to assert is to present as true (assuming that Frege is correct; but see Williamson 1996). That claim holds in virtue of our concepts TRUTH and ASSERTION. (Recall that even if the claim is true in virtue of the concepts, it is not true in virtue of the *existence* of those concepts). We do not need to posit any universals—concepts do the job for us. Conceptual truths, it should be clear, simply are not ontologically loaded. It goes without saying that *that bachelors are unmarried* is true even in certain possible worlds where there are no bachelors. In one such world, children are all married off while they are infants, so no one reaches adulthood unmarried. Nevertheless, it remains true in such worlds that bachelors are unmarried—it’s just that there are none. Similarly, *that to assert is to present as true* would be true in our world even if there were no assertions, for that truth does not commit us to any.

In sum, the best candidates for truths that might need a universal *truth* as a truthmaker (or other ontological ground) are those truths that evade deflationary analysis. Such truths make explicit and indispensable mention of truth, and thus we cannot simply disquote or

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<sup>53</sup>Of course one might think that not all conceptual truths are analytic, though I do not see the motivation for that kind of view. Analytic truths are true in virtue of their constituents’ meanings, which are best understood in terms of concepts.

denominalize away the appearances of ‘truth’ and ‘true’ therein. But those truths are going to be conceptual truths, for they are the result of identifying important conceptual connections between truth and other concepts, and thus do not even fall under the umbrella of truthmaking. The problem truths are potential problems for *conceptual* deflationism only, and accordingly rely on our concept TRUTH (which we have), not a universal *truth* (which does not exist). Opponents of conceptual deflationism argue that truth has conceptual connections to other notions that go beyond its traditional deflationary role. But even if truth is a rich and explanatory concept, it does not follow that there is a universal lurking behind it. We should not posit a universal for every concept, just as we should not posit a universal for every predicate.<sup>54</sup>

All told, the positive case for treating truth as a sparse property is weak. The class of truths is a great candidate for *not* exhibiting genuine resemblance, truth is not a causal property, and truth is not needed as a property to serve any truthmaking function. Consequently, we have undermined the motivation for believing any of **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>4</sub>**. There is simply no need for *truth*.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.3.2. Taking *truth* to absurdity

Now we may turn to a second line of argument against metaphysical substantivism. If there were such a thing as a universal *truth* or set of truth tropes, then they would provide an

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<sup>54</sup>Plenty of our concepts are explanatorily useful, even if they correspond to no universal. We can go a long way toward explaining the behavior of teenagers by way of employing COOL, though *cool* certainly does not exist. Certain moral concepts may help explain lots of behavior and lots of our moral beliefs, even if there are no moral properties (metaphysically understood).

<sup>55</sup>Here’s another little argument against substantivism. If *truth* exists, then every true proposition instantiates it, and so for any true proposition, there will be a state of affairs of that proposition’s bearing *truth* that will make that proposition true. So, taking *truth* to exist entails truthmaker maximalism. So reasons for rejecting maximalism (whether from Milne’s paradoxical sentences, or my concerns from analyticity, or considerations involving negative existentials) are reasons for rejecting substantivism about truth.

army of redundant truthmakers. That fact in and of itself is no objection to substantivism about truth; the real problem is that they would provide an army of *fully distinct* redundant truthmakers. If so, then the view runs straight into contradiction.

This second argument against metaphysical substantivism about truth takes the form of a dilemma. Suppose that any of **MS**<sub>1</sub> through **MS**<sub>3</sub> is true. Then it is the case that for any truth *p*, there will be both its familiar truthmaker F and a redundant truthmaker for it R.<sup>56</sup> F and R are either fully distinct, or there are necessary connections between them. If F and R are fully distinct, then R can exist even if F doesn't. R is a truthmaker for *p*, and so *p* can be true even if F does not exist. Below, this will be seen to be contradictory. If F and R are not fully distinct, then there must be some metaphysical justification for positing the existence of R and its brute necessary connection to F. But there is no such justification, and so the view is unmotivated. Hence, metaphysical substantivism about truth is either contradictory or unmotivated.

Let us dig into this argument with a concrete example. Take again our sample true proposition, <Smith is six feet tall>. The “familiar” truthmaker F here is either the realist’s state of affairs composed of Smith and the universal *six feet tall*, or the moderate nominalist’s six feet tall trope that belongs to Smith. The “redundant” truthmaker R here is either the state of affairs composed of <Smith is six feet tall> and *truth* or the truth trope belonging to <Smith is six feet tall>. F and R are either fully distinct existences, or there are necessary connections between them, in which case at least one of them depends for its existence upon the existence of the other. Either way leads to trouble.

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<sup>56</sup>I'm here supposing *truthmaker maximalism*—the claim that every truth has a truthmaker. Those who reject maximalism, as we have, must also reject substantivism about truth, because substantivism entails maximalism. (See footnote 55. On substantivism, there will be an R for every *p*.)

If F and R are fully distinct, then it's possible for R to exist and for F to fail to exist. Notice just what this possibility is. We have the proposition <Smith is six feet tall> instantiating *truth*, and so we have a true proposition. But this is also a possibility where Smith does not instantiate *six feet tall*. What we have, in other words, is a possible scenario in which Smith is not six feet tall, even though the proposition <Smith is six feet tall> is true. But that is impossible, since, necessarily, the proposition that Smith is six feet tall is true if and only if Smith is six feet tall. If F and R are fully distinct, then substantivism about truth reduces to absurdity.

Suppose, then, that F and R are not fully distinct; their existence is tied up with one another, such that R cannot exist unless F also exists. I argued already in the previous section that this view is implausible; there are no obvious grounds for taking F and R to be necessarily connected, and so to find them so connected must involve positing a brute necessary connection between them. But we should posit entities like R, and their brute necessary connection to more familiar things like F, only when there are compelling metaphysical reasons for doing so, such as accounting for resemblance, causality, and truthmaking. R is not needed for any of those things, so positing its existence and its brute connection to F is unmotivated.

Notice also that this argument does not rely specifically on truth being a property rather than a relation. Suppose for instance that truth is instead a two-place universal. (The correspondence theorist might have such a view in mind.) So suppose that the proposition <Smith is six feet tall> stands in the truth relational universal to some correspondent, C. Here we have three things: the proposition, the relational universal *truth*, and the correspondent C. The proposition is true, and so the state of affairs composed of the three entities exists. There

seem to be two options for what C could be. It could just be the familiar truthmaker F (or something not fully distinct from it), in which case F itself is all we need to account for the truth of the proposition. The detour through the relational universal is unnecessary. Or C could be something fully distinct from F. In that case, the state of affairs of the proposition's standing in the truth relation to C could exist even if F doesn't, for *ex hypothesi* they are fully distinct entities. And here the original argument resumes: C and F being fully distinct leads either to contradiction or an unmotivated metaphysics.

Given that truthmaker theory is available to provide the requisite grounds for truths, metaphysical substantivism about truth is either contradictory or unmotivated. Even for those who embrace a serious metaphysics of properties, we can see that there is no need to take truth to be a metaphysically serious property. Indeed, it seems that there would be absolutely no need for *any* property besides truth if we embraced substantivism about truth. If all we need is R to account for the truth of <Smith is six feet tall>, then we don't need Smith or the property of being six feet tall. The proposition and *truth* do all the necessary labor themselves. If *truth* were a distinct entity, we could use it to create a possible world in which all the propositions true in the actual world are true (by having each of those propositions instantiate *truth*), despite none of the familiar objects of the actual world existing in it. But that is absurd. Yet if *truth* can't do that labor by itself—if it needs help from things like Smith and *six feet tall*—then it's just a metaphysical deadbeat, with nothing of its own to contribute.

### 3.3.3. Unnatural truth

The previous argument was directed specifically at **MS<sub>1</sub>** through **MS<sub>3</sub>**. Let us now give a little special attention to **MS<sub>4</sub>**, the Lewisian-flavored view that while there is no

universal *truth* or resemblance class of truth tropes, there is a natural class of truths. (Note that there is no reason to suppose that Lewis himself would have endorsed **MS<sub>4</sub>**. I'm quite sure he would have dismissed it without reservation.) In his seminal paper "New Work for a Theory of Universals", Lewis distinguishes between properties and natural properties.<sup>57</sup> Properties are any old class of objects. The property red is just the class of red things (including merely possible red things, for Lewis). The property grue is just the class of grue things. Since any collection of objects forms a property, the notion of a property itself is indiscriminating. In Lewis's phrase, "Properties carve reality at the joints—and everywhere else as well" (1983: 346). Since such an indiscriminating notion of a property is unable to perform any of the metaphysical work from above that is undertaken by tropes and universals, Lewis proposes that we think of there being an "élite minority of special properties" that he deems to be *natural*, where naturalness is allowed to come in degrees, and taken to be a theoretical primitive (ibid.). The natural properties are those that serve to account for resemblances between objects, and for performing the world's causal duties. Might positing truth as a natural property be of any such use? My answer, unsurprisingly, is 'no'. Because much of the groundwork has been laid above, we can make short shrift of **MS<sub>4</sub>**.

In thinking about **MS<sub>4</sub>**, we may first observe that the property truth definitely exists, for there are truths. Whatever those truths are, collect them together, and name the class 'truth'. Let us assume that the members of truth are all propositions, for the sake of simplicity. If we follow Lewis, we should include in truth all the merely possible truths, thus including the entire collection of non-contradictory propositions. Otherwise, we may just include all actual truths as members of truth.

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<sup>57</sup>See also Quinton 1957-1958.

Now the question is whether we have anything to gain by positing truth as belonging to that special club of natural properties, alongside such things as, say, charge and mass. We do not. The simple reason why is that, as above, there is no special labor for a promoted truth to perform. I have stressed all along the insight common to deflationists and truthmaker theorists alike that there is nothing in common between truths—it is false to say that truths are true in virtue of their sharing some common feature. In fact, when we do suppose them to have something in common, we see how quickly we run into absurdity. The truth that snow is white and the truth that Chapel Hill is in North Carolina share very little, if anything, in common. The class of true propositions is one remarkably heterogeneous collection. The property truth thus seems to be a perfect candidate for being perfectly non-natural! Consequently, we seek in vain if we look for something metaphysically substantial to account for the “resemblances” between truths. The truth of each proposition is its own private affair; *that electrons exist* is true in virtue of electrons, and *that penguins exist* is true in virtue of penguins. Simply put, there are no objective resemblances between truths for which we need to account. To account for why all the various true propositions are true, we have to consider each proposition on its own terms and attend to its individual metaphysical and ontological commitments. It is true because the world provides the requisite substance, but that is not some single, common feature to be accounted for by a philosophical notion of a property. As a result, we do not need to bestow naturalness upon truth for purposes of accounting for the (non-existent) objective resemblances between truths.

Furthermore, if we did grant to truth the caliber of being natural, should we not also bestow it upon the property falsity? The class of truths and the class of falsities seem to be equally deserving of being natural properties. They are equally homogeneous (which is to say,

not at all), and the members of one have just as much in common with one another as do the members of the other. But if we have any reservations about attributing causal powers, say, to truth, we should definitely have reservations about attributing causal powers to falsity. After all, if we do think that true theories have causal powers in virtue of their being natural, we should think that false theories also have causal powers, since falsity has as good a claim to naturalness as does truth. (The problem is exacerbated if we follow Lewis in allowing *possibilia* into properties, for then truth and falsity will both include each and every contingent proposition, including all the empirical ones, which presumably are the members of the class most likely to be responsible for causal activities.) We should, of course, treat truth and falsity the same with respect to naturalness. Neither property is natural.

#### 3.3.4. Closing remarks

We have now considered the four main theses that are the most salient rejections of metaphysical deflationism. They all suffer from the same defects. They all turn to a metaphysical category that is normally reserved for giving satisfying accounts of truthmaking, resemblance, and causality. But, as we have seen, the motivations that drive us to posit metaphysically substantive properties simply do not apply when it comes to truth. Truths do not share objective resemblances, nor does truth itself have a causal role to play in the universe. Furthermore, we do not need metaphysically loaded notions of truth to serve as truthmakers; the objects that truths are about perform that need on their own. If we were to posit truth as being an independently existing thing (or set of things), it would have truthmaking capabilities that would take us directly to absurdity. We do not need a robust

property of truth to account for the truths we find in the world, and it was a mistake ever to think that we should look for one.<sup>58, 59</sup>

Given that no one has approached the issue of metaphysical deflationism and substantivism about truth in the manner that I have been, it's unclear whether anyone has explicitly adopted metaphysical substantivism as we have been understanding it. Certainly many have said that they think truth is a robust, metaphysically loaded property. Consider, for example, many of the recent defenders of correspondence theories. In his recent defense, Andrew Newman (2002) defends a correspondence theory in the context of realism about universals. Newman thinks that truth is a property—that there is something shared by all and only true things. Hence, given his defense of realism about universals, it seems likely that he is committed to thinking of truth as being one such universal. He even suggests that truth might be a natural kind (2002: 45). Richard Fumerton writes that “realists” about truth (more on that topic later, in section 4.5) must think that there's a property of truth, but needn't be realists about universals (2002: 4). But if they are realists about universals, does that mean that they must think that there's a universal *truth*? Presumably, lest realism about truth turn

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<sup>58</sup>Cf. Lowe: “I do not consider that a true proposition is one that exemplifies the universal *truth*, nor that it possesses a truth *trope* or *mode*, whether or not conceived as a particular instance of such a universal” (2007: 237). Lowe points out that if truth did consist in a truth-bearer engaging with a universal or trope, then its truth would “just be a matter of how that proposition was ‘in itself’”, which misses the relational nature of truth—that true propositions owe their truth to something else (ibid.). Lowe and I travel different paths to the same thesis, but I am happy to endorse nearly everything he says on the matter. It is worth noting that Lowe is the only writer I have ever come across who considers bringing the going metaphysical accounts of properties to bear on the topic of truth.

<sup>59</sup>Note that Armstrong agrees with the substance of my view here, but not the packaging. It is central to his account of truthmaking that the truthmaking relation (necessitation) is an internal relation, and thus “no addition of being” above and beyond the relata. Truth itself may easily be seen as supervening on the instances of truthmaking, and thus there is no need for a universal *truth*. Thus, he subscribes to metaphysical deflationism (perhaps without even realizing it). Recall how David has summarized Armstrong's view: “Be serious about truthmakers but not so serious about truth and truthmaking” (2005: 147). That Armstrong sometimes calls his view a correspondence theory of truth is unfortunate, because he posits no additional relation beyond the relata, and no set of objects specifically for truths to correspond to (see his 1997: 128, 2004: 16-17, and 2010). One can call the truthmaking relation “correspondence”, and say that the objects that truths correspond to just are their truthmakers, but what we have here is just a theory of truthmaking, and not a kind of metaphysically substantive correspondence theory that has been our target here.

out to be consistent with its deflationary opponent. Gerald Vision (2004) also defends the existence of a truth property, but is completely silent as to what kind of property it is. Lynch (2009) is a pluralist (or functionalist) about truth in that he thinks truth sometimes consists in correspondence with the facts, sometimes in being superwarranted, and perhaps something else in other cases. Lynch is also silent on what he means by ‘property’, but he is very clear that truths are true in virtue of their having one of those properties. He explicitly says that the truth properties are what make truths true: “Propositions about different subjects can be made true by distinct properties each of which plays the truth-role” (2009: 77).<sup>60</sup> Others who shy away from correspondence accounts have endorsed the idea that truth is a property, and in so doing take themselves to be rejecting deflationism, but fall silent on what metaphysical story they think underlies the property (Alston 1996, Merricks 2007).

The complete silence on the topic is frustrating, to say the least, given how often opponents of deflationism appeal to there being a metaphysically robust property of truth in order to distinguish themselves from deflationists.<sup>61</sup> Anyone who accepts my account of metaphysical substantivism about truth can see that it is false, and not a view worth holding. Anyone who rejects my account faces the challenge of saying just what it is that a metaphysically substantive property of truth would be, if not a universal, trope, or natural class (and why deflationists are not entitled to it).

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<sup>60</sup>Cf. Fine 1984b: “these ideas of correspondence and approximate truth are supposed to explain what *makes* the truth *true*” (97).

<sup>61</sup>My guess is that most theorists would prefer to remain agnostic about how we should understand the truth property, and hence they remain silent on what they mean by ‘property’. Substantivists defend the view that truth is a substantive property, but remain neutral on the more general issue of realism and nominalism. Still, regardless of which view one takes on the realism/nominalism debate, there will be a distinction needing to be drawn between the sparse and abundant properties. Substantivists about truth, presumably, will always think that truth falls on the sparse side of the divide. (Everyone can agree that truth is among the abundant properties.) What my argument shows is that regardless of where one settles on the realism/nominalism side, truth cannot belong on the sparse side of the divide.

### 3.4. Conclusion

In a very interesting passage, Armstrong comes very close to the view we are now adopting (though he packages it quite differently). After describing his own personal “unstable oscillation” between the redundancy and correspondence theories of truth—he invokes the famous debate between Austin (1950) and Strawson (1950)<sup>62</sup>—Armstrong offers his theory of truthmaking as enabling a reconciliation between the two competing theories.

He writes:

The suggestion now to be put forward is that we can accept both theories. Both tell us something true about the nature of truth. The Redundancy theory gives us a true account of the semantics of the truth predicate, but it stays at the level of truths. At a deeper, ontological, level the Correspondence theory tells us that, since truths require a truthmaker, there is something in the world that corresponds to a true proposition. The correspondent and the truthmaker are the same thing. (1997: 128)

Like Armstrong, we have found in truthmaker theory something of a happy compromise between deflationism about truth and the correspondence theory of truth. Truthmaker theory as I have defended it, in effect, embraces the best of both worlds. With deflationism, truthmaker theory shares the idea that each truth is unique. There is nothing in common between all truths—truthmaker theorists approach truths in piecemeal fashion, just like deflationists. There need not be any property shared by all truths, and it is metaphysically devastating to install one. As such, we avoid having to posit any metaphysically substantive property of truth. In so doing, we end up rejecting correspondence theories of truth (and plenty more besides). Nevertheless, as we saw in the last chapter, truthmaker theory preserves the important ideas that drive correspondence theories, and make them seem so natural. Truthmaker theory preserves the worldliness of truth that correspondence insists on (and deflationism falls silent on). It even accounts for the worldliness better by providing a

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<sup>62</sup>A debate, by the way, which included a third interlocutor, seemingly forgotten to history (Cousin 1950).

world of truthmakers (and not necessarily a world of facts). Where Armstrong says that we can accept both the redundancy view and the correspondence view, I say that we may accept metaphysical deflationism, but preserve the ontological motivation behind correspondence theories (that truths are “worldly”—that they accompany ontological and metaphysical commitments).

In arguing against there being any metaphysical substance to the notion of truth, I have not yet sealed the deal for deflationism, for there is more to deflationism about truth than simply metaphysical deflationism. Truthmaker theorists (and everyone else besides) should indeed embrace metaphysical deflationism. There is no property of truth, where ‘property’ is understood in the terms of any of the standard metaphysical positions. But whether conceptual deflationism is true is still up for grabs; truthmaking is neutral on the issue, for nothing in it relies on anything more than a deflationary account of truth. However, since metaphysical deflationism is true, we should reject any theory of truth that posits a loaded property of truth. I take it that most of the versions of most of the traditional theories—correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, epistemic—are committed to metaphysical substantivism.<sup>63</sup> The parties to the debate, at least, often use the language that such views are committed to a robust property of truth. If so, they are false. If those views can be resuscitated in a way such that they are not committed to a metaphysically substantive account of truth, then they can deflect my argument. It’s just not terribly clear what such views would be, or why they would be anathema to deflationists. In any event, anyone hoping to defend one of the traditional theories in the face of my argument must find a way to offer a substantive theory in a metaphysically deflationary way.

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<sup>63</sup>Lynch’s view seems to be multiply committed to metaphysical substantivism, given that he thinks there are *many* properties that realize truth (though he thinks truth itself is a unique, single property immanent to its multiple realizers).

In the meantime, suppose that we can now set aside the traditional theories of truth. To my mind, the best remaining candidates are conceptual deflationism (e.g., Horwich and Field) and conceptual primitivism (e.g., Frege and Davidson). Hence, I think that truthmaker theory reveals that *if* truth (the *concept* of truth, that is) is substantive, then it is primitive. Truthmaker theory by itself does not tell between the two, but focuses the debate nevertheless. The primitivist thinks that our concept of truth is an explanatorily interesting notion, and one that can figure into analyses of other notions in ways that go beyond truth's logical features. But the primitivist need not think that truth is a property in any metaphysically substantive sense—the foundational role it plays in our conceptual scheme is not one that needs the aid of any causal or truthmaking powers.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, primitivists *shouldn't* think that truth is a metaphysically substantive property, if the argument of this chapter is correct. Consequently, I think that adopting truthmaker theory should push the philosophical debate over truth in a new direction, even though it does not offer any theory of truth of its own. The debate now should be waged not between deflationists and advocates of correspondence (or other substantive accounts), but between conceptual deflationists and conceptual primitivists.

We may conclude with one final lesson we can learn from the relationship between deflationism and truthmaker theory. I mentioned above that Quine was wrong to identify the T-schema as “the valid residue of the correspondence theory of truth” (1990: 93). Instead, the valid residue of the correspondence theory is the idea at the center of truthmaker theory: that truths are grounded in reality—that truths accompany metaphysical and ontological

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<sup>64</sup>My money, then, is on there being no metaphysically substantive property of truth, but there being a substantive concept of truth. Compare this view with its inverse in Alston 2002, which discusses there being a deflationary concept of truth paired with a more robust property of truth. Alston and I share the desire of somehow reconciling what is right about deflationism with what is right about correspondence theories, albeit in very different ways.

commitments. Quine would have been closer to the truth had he said that it's his criterion for ontological commitment that is the grain of truth in the correspondence theory.<sup>65</sup> As I have argued, truthmaker theory shares the fundamental motivation underlying correspondence theory, and satisfies it better. There is an important lesson here for deflationists. Opponents of correspondence accounts typically find something legitimate about them nevertheless, and go to some length in order to show how they too can maintain the language of correspondence, or countenance the "correspondence intuition" (e.g., Horwich 1990, Wright 1992, Hill 2002). While I agree that deflationists can uphold what is right about correspondence theories, I don't think they can accomplish it via their own theories.<sup>66</sup>

The axioms of deflationary theories of truth are typically just T-sentences, such as:

(5) The proposition that snow is white is true if and only if snow is white.

Nothing about the T-sentence itself shows that the truth in question here—that snow is white—depends in any way upon reality. It's one thing to say that 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white. It's quite another to say that 'Snow is white' has a truthmaker, and to say just what that truthmaker is. A T-sentence states that there is some sort of equivalence holding between its two sides, but is silent about how those two sides, if true, depend upon the world.

Many theorists, however, write as if the "worldliness" of truth is built right into the T-sentences already—in their right hand conditions, most likely.<sup>67</sup> But the right-hand side of a T-sentence does nothing to state what the truthmaker is for the truth-bearer mentioned on the

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<sup>65</sup>More on Quine on ontological commitment in section 4.2.

<sup>66</sup>Here I disagree with Horwich 1990.

<sup>67</sup>See, for instance, Popper 1963: 223-228, Quine 1970: 10-11 and 1990: 81, and Vision 2003. James Young (2009) advocates a view of this sort, and thinks that some canonical deflationists like Ramsey and Strawson are actually correspondence theorists. See Ramsey 1991 and Strawson 1998.

left-hand side. The right-hand side is *just another truth in need of a truthmaker*. Of course, ‘Socrates is a philosopher’ is true if and only if Socrates is a philosopher. Everyone can agree to that. But the issue of what makes it true that Socrates is a philosopher is a substantive and contentious issue—is it an Armstrongian state of affairs, trope, Socrates himself under a counterpart relation, or perhaps nothing at all?<sup>68</sup> T-sentences do nothing to settle the issue about what a truth’s truthmaker is, or even if it has one. Hence, someone might subscribe to 5 and yet think that the world does not have to be any way in order for either of its conditions to be true—here I am thinking of Rorty and Arthur Fine, who think ontological positions are bunk. They think that we can accept the truth of all sorts of claims, and yet not take on any ontological worldview.

Consider also Jody Azzouni’s brand of mathematical nominalism (2004).<sup>69</sup> He agrees that ‘There are numbers’ is true, and is happy to grant the truth of the T-sentence

(6) ‘There are numbers’ is true if and only if there are numbers.

For all that, he does not think that ‘There are numbers’ is made true by reality (or at least a reality including numbers). The point is that the world doesn’t automatically “show up” in the right-hand side of the biconditional. Accepting the T-sentences is one thing; to think that their conditions are ontologically loaded is quite another. One needs an account of truthmaking in order to take a stand on how and whether truths depend upon reality. The T-sentences themselves don’t offer that. To suppose otherwise is to bring to the table an antecedent understanding of how truth depends upon reality, which is precisely to bring to the table an antecedent understanding of truthmaking.

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<sup>68</sup>See, respectively, Armstrong 2004, Lowe 2007, Lewis 2003, and Lewis 2001b.

<sup>69</sup>See also Hofweber 2005a.

My recommendation to deflationists (and to opponents of correspondence accounts more generally) is that they continue thinking that they too can salvage what is right about correspondence theories. But to do so, they have to admit some sort of theory of truthmaking in order to meet the challenge. The worldliness of truth is not accounted for simply by the T-sentences; they need to be supplemented by a theory of truthmakers. Fortunately, deflationism is no obstacle to truthmaker theory. To save the “correspondence intuition”, deflationists need only embrace some sort of theory of truthmaking.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>David writes: “One usually regards Quine as the father of contemporary deflationism about truth. Yet, serious concern for the idea that truths are made true by reality is often seen as a sign of inflationary thinking about truth” (2008: 275, footnote 2). David’s concern here is with the early pages of Quine 1970, which embraces the idea that truths are made true by reality, and marries it (and even perhaps attempts to reduce it) to his disquotational view of truth. We now are in a position to understand what is going on. One’s theory of truth and one’s view on truthmaking and/or ontological commitment need to be separated, as Quine admirably does. The fact that many philosophers have not fully appreciated the distinction, as David points out, leads some to think that truthmaking talk (including Quine’s own words here) just is “inflationary” talk about truth. (This seems to be the view of O’Leary-Hawthorne and Oppy 1997.) We know better. The role of ‘truth’ in *truthmaker* theory is just like the role of truth everywhere else—it is serving as a handy abbreviatory device. To think that ‘There are gorillas’ is made true by gorillas is good common sense, and good truthmaker theory. To think that deflationists about truth must deny that ‘There are gorillas’ is made true by gorillas is to impose on them an indefensible and (in my view) contradictory position. Careful attention to the distinction between truth and truthmaking is of paramount importance. To be a deflationist about truth is emphatically not to be a deflationist about metaphysical inquiry. Once more for good measure: that *truth* is not a metaphysically substantive notion in no way entails that *truths* themselves carry no metaphysical substance.

## 4. Truthmaking and Realism

The first three chapters have covered the topic of truthmaker theory, its nature, and how it relates to the theory of truth. Now we turn to the topic of realism and anti-realism, with the intent of showing how truthmaker theory can reveal what is at stake in this perennial metaphysical debate, and how we can make some progress within it. The goal of the present chapter is to offer a truthmaker-based account of realism. To get there, however, we have some corrective work to do. First, we must appreciate why the theory of *truth* is not the driving force behind debates about realism. Second, we must appreciate why the theory of truthmakers is *not* a theory of ontological commitment, akin to Quine's. Once those issues are handled, we can turn to how truthmaker theory can inform metaphysical debates about realism. In subsequent chapters, we take up particular realism debates specifically: moral realism in the next chapter, and scientific realism in the final chapter.

### 4.1. Truth and realism: a defense of neutrality

Discussions of realism in philosophy have never strayed very far from the topic of truth. Although there is substantial disagreement regarding just how closely tied the two notions are, it is undeniable that the two (justly or not) have been brought to bear on one another quite frequently. Our task now is to establish how best we should understand the interconnections that do or do not obtain between truth and realism. I favor the view of what I shall call *neutrality*: the positions one stakes out in one of the debates do not force one's hand regarding the positions one stakes out in the other debate. Opposing neutrality is the

view that certain theses one might hold regarding truth or realism commits one to specific theses regarding the other. The neutralist view is not only correct, but methodologically preferable as well. I have already advocated *methodological maximalism* and *methodological deflationism*. Let me now add to the list *methodological neutrality*: In defending a particular philosophical position, one should avoid as far as is possible taking on substantive commitments in other philosophical areas. The further two domains of philosophy are from one another, the more reluctant one should be to undertake a substantive commitment in one in order to defend a substantive commitment in the other. I do not mean to be rejecting out of hand a more holistic conception of theory construction according to which one's commitments in one area shape and inform one's commitments in many (if not all) other areas. Certainly the positions we stake out for ourselves greatly influence the other positions we adopt. But in advancing a certain philosophical thesis, its plausibility and attractiveness will in part be a function of what other commitments it requires. The fewer substantive auxiliary commitments that are required, the more potential allies the view can gain (for it rules out fewer of those who may not be able to grant the auxiliary commitments). Methodologically speaking, then, neutrality between truth and realism is to be favored. And, in fact, I believe it to be true as well.

Looking back at the history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we can see that neutrality was not the leading view.<sup>1</sup> One way to view the dialectic between the British idealists and the early analytic philosophers is through the lens of the theory of truth. British Hegelians like Joachim (1906) and Bradley (1907) found the notion of

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<sup>1</sup>Here is Putnam: "That one could have a theory of truth which is neutral with respect to epistemological questions, and even with respect to the great metaphysical issue of realism versus idealism, would have seemed preposterous to a nineteenth-century philosopher" (1978: 9). Cf. Blackburn 1980, where "realism vs. instrumentalism" is characterized as a debate in the theory of truth.

correspondence truth lacking, and advocated in its place a more holistic coherence theory of truth.<sup>2</sup> While idealism and coherence came together in British Hegelianism, realism and correspondence came together in the early work of Russell (1912, chapter 12) and Moore (1953, chapter 15). Interestingly, both sides seemed to be motivated by the desire to thwart skepticism.<sup>3</sup> The idealists, finding truth as correspondence to be radically independent of the mental, judged such truth to be inaccessible and hence unknowable.<sup>4</sup> The realists, finding truth as coherence to be far too dependent on the mental, judged such views unable to countenance the reality of an independently existing external world. The foes of realism have long since multiplied in number, and idealism is no longer at the front lines of the battle between realists and their opponents.<sup>5</sup> Further, the debate in the theory of truth is now fought primarily between deflationists and substantivists; the dialectic between correspondence and coherence accounts has been comparatively quiet for some time.<sup>6</sup> So while I note the historical non-neutrality that operated in turn-of-the-century British philosophy, I shall not discuss it any further, for non-neutrality returned with a vengeance decades later.

The gulf that separates neutralists from non-neutralists nowadays does not coincide with the gulfs that separate realists and anti-realists. One finds neutralists among realists, anti-realists, and even the quietists who seek to undermine, transcend, or erase the issue. The same is true for non-neutralists. Leading advocates of neutrality include Michael Devitt

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<sup>2</sup>But see again Candlish 1989.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Davidson 1990: 298-299.

<sup>4</sup>This sentiment still exists in our time, though it is more often wielded by pragmatists nowadays. See Putnam's various discussions of "internal" and "metaphysical" realism (e.g., his 1978, 1981, chapter 3, 1982a, 1982b, and 1987), Ellis 1985, and Jardine 1986.

<sup>5</sup>However, some, like Putnam (1978) and Fine (1986), are happy to assimilate contemporary anti-realisms as kinds of idealism.

<sup>6</sup>But see Walker 1989 and Young 2001 for recent discussion and defense, respectively, of coherence theories.

(1984, 1991, 2006), a firm defender of realism, and Horwich (1990, 1996, 2006), who now defends a kind of quietism.<sup>7</sup> Influential non-neutralists include quietists like Arthur Fine (1984a, 1984b, 1986), realists like Philip Kitcher (2001, 2002), quasi-realists such as Blackburn (1971), and the ever hard to place Putnam (1978, 1981).<sup>8</sup> Dummett's rampant non-neutrality (1958-1959, 1982) deserves a category all its own. Neutralists argue that the topics of truth and realism are orthogonal. Their arguments tend to show how a careful articulation of the two topics reveals that they do not intersect, and they then go on to explain why it is often mistakenly thought that they do. Non-neutralists often identify realism with some form of correspondence theory of truth, or argue that correspondence truth is a necessary component of realism. Fine argues in addition that various anti-realisms also import particular theories of truth (usually pragmatic or epistemically-laced ones) as a necessary component (1984a, 1984b, 1986). My attempt in this section is to debunk non-neutrality, and to show why it nevertheless is tempting.

The most comprehensive way to argue for neutrality is to articulate various theories about the nature of truth, articulate various realist and anti-realist theses, and then demonstrate the consistency of the various combinations. Doing so would require us to articulate what realism is. That is dangerous ground, and we're going to put it off for as long as possible. 'Realism' is a slippery term, and realism has many faces.<sup>9</sup> Still, Horwich (1996) and Devitt (1984, 1991) have taken on just that approach in their work on the subject, and for the most part I am happy to endorse everything they say. (Though their arguments, of

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<sup>7</sup>See also Tarski 1944, David 1994: 18, footnote 2, Van Cleve 1996, Azzouni 2000, and Alston 2001: 48.

<sup>8</sup>See also Bonjour 1985: 160, Railton 1986, Wright 1986 and 1992, Fales 1988, Jennings 1989: 240, Matheson 1989, Bigelow and Pargetter 1990: 442, Musgrave 1996: 23, Timmons 1999: 36, Taylor 2006, Williams 2006, and Lynch 2009.

<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, Horwich 1982 and its distinction between three kinds of realism. Cf. Putnam 1982a, and its three distinct kinds of realism.

practical necessity, cannot engage every thesis that has been put forth in the name of either truth or realism.) Let us see how far we can get without fully committing to what realism is or is not. We can simply say again that realism, whatever else it is, involves some level of metaphysical commitment, some acknowledgement of the reality of some domain of thought.

First suppose that one is a deflationist about truth. Does deflationism prevent one from taking on any of the substantive metaphysical commitments that are characteristic of realism? Absolutely not. As our earlier discussion in section 3.2.1 made clear, deflationism about truth does not preclude taking on a criterion or theory of ontological commitment, or from embracing truthmaker theory. In slogan form, we can say that to take *truth* as metaphysically minimal is not to take *truths* as metaphysically minimal. True, to say that it is true that there are moral properties is no more metaphysically committing than it is to say that there are moral properties. But to say that there are moral properties *is* metaphysically committing—it commits one to moral properties! Deflationism is neither here nor there when it comes to realist metaphysical commitments. The metaphysical substance comes from what is accepted as true, not in the predication of truth to what is accepted. So deflationism does not preclude taking on realist positions.

Neither does it require doing so. One might refuse to take on any notion of ontological commitment, or, with Azzouni (2006), think that truths can be true in spite of their not making any metaphysical difference to the world. One might, like Rorty, have no truck whatsoever with the notion of ontological commitment, banishing it from philosophy as so much metaphysical mumbo jumbo (1986). Fine’s “natural ontological attitude” similarly (and oxymoronically) takes no ontological stand (1984b). Taking the natural ontological attitude toward some domain involves accepting the pronouncements of that domain as true,

but then taking no stand whatsoever regarding the theory of truth or truthmaking that is most adequate for that domain.<sup>10</sup> Fine and Rorty are best understood as allowing whatever the deflationist says about truth, accepting the dictates of what the experts in a domain say as true, but then severing any bridge between truth and ontology that one might build via a theory of truthmakers. Realist commitments (or the avoidance of such) come via the combination of what one takes to be true taken together with one's theory of what makes those truths true, not via one's theory of truth. Hence, if one accepts deflationism about truth, one is not precluded from taking on realist commitments (as in Quine), nor is one forced to countenance them (as in Rorty and Fine). Deflationism and realism are neutral with respect to one another.<sup>11</sup> Should one still have lingering worries that correspondence truth is a necessary component of realism, I suggest he consider Quine's view regarding sets.<sup>12</sup> Quine is a realist about sets because he believes in a theory that quantifies over sets (and he is a realist about everything over which he quantifies). So Quine believes in sets. That he rejects the claim that 'There are sets' stands in the correspondence relation to some non-linguistic fact is simply beside the point.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Funny, then, that what Fine calls the natural ontological attitude (or 'NOA', pronounced as in 'Noah') actually requires taking no *attitude* regarding *ontology*: "NOA, as such, has no specific ontological commitments" (1986: 176). More to the point, the NOAer (pronounced as in 'knower') is forbidden from taking on any ontological commitments. In Musgrave's characteristically clever phrase, the NOAer is a know-nothing (1989: 391). Some readers familiar with Fine may claim not to see this reading of him in his work. I shall make good on my interpretation in detail below, in section 6.1.

<sup>11</sup>For a competing view, see Boghossian's argument (1990) to the effect that deflationists cannot be non-factualists. This is not the place to take on Boghossian's argument, but suffice it to say that I find his characterizations of the relevant positions unfamiliar and misleading.

<sup>12</sup>Or consider Lewis's modal realism (1986). Lewis is no correspondence theorist (2001a), and thus rejects the claim that 'There is a pluriverse of possible worlds' stands in the correspondence relation to some fact. But he is as realist as it comes with respect to possible worlds. His realism is due to what he is willing to predicate truth of, not to the predication itself.

<sup>13</sup>A familiar charge to make against quietists is that they, despite their anti-philosophical ambitions, are just realists who employ overblown rhetoric. Hence Devitt (1991) thinks Rorty is a realist, Musgrave (1989) thinks Fine is a realist, and David (2006) thinks Horwich is a realist. Similarly, many think that quasi-realists just are

Suppose now that one endorses some version or other of a correspondence theory of truth. Here we might think that our hands *are* forced, for correspondence just is correspondence *with reality*. But let us be careful here. Correspondence theories are about what truth is; they say nothing about what exists, or what is real. Correspondence theories themselves do not entail that certain elements of reality—the elements that are relevant to realism—exist. It is no consequence of any correspondence theory of truth that numbers exist, or that numbers are a genuine portion of reality. To establish realism, one must go beyond embracing a correspondence theory of truth. One must take on other kinds of commitments; one's realism will emerge only via those additional commitments, not simply by way of one's acceptance of a correspondence theory of truth. Error theorists about a domain, for example, can embrace a correspondence theory of truth; yet they avoid taking on any realist commitments by not committing to any truths in the domain. So correspondence theories by themselves do not force realist commitments on anyone. Nor, of course, do they preclude it. One can accept that truth is correspondence to reality, and then go on to embrace the truth (and hence realist commitments) of many different domains of discourse.

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realists (see Blackburn 1993d). One thought as to what is going on here is that our quietists are happy to admit everything that their realist (supposed) opponent says—explaining the appearance of realism—but separate themselves only by disavowing any connection between the truth of what they say and its ontological commitments. The quietists' critics may not have in mind the possibility that one could do without any criterion of ontological commitment or theory of truthmakers, or think that truths might carry no metaphysical commitments. (Quine (1970: 89) thought it impossible to do without his own, for he thought the criterion to be trivial!) But that is what I think the quietists are up to. Quietists themselves are not so clear on the matter. A familiar motif in Rorty (e.g., in his 1986) is that once we dump the notion of correspondence truth, we are freed from representation, metaphysics, and the like. But Rorty does not earn his quietism via his rejection of correspondence truth—to think one earns one's anti-realism via rejecting correspondence truth is to betray one's false belief in non-neutrality between truth and realism. One earns quietism by disavowing all criteria of ontological or metaphysical commitment, not via disavowing correspondence theories of truth. Otherwise all deflationists—Quine included—would be quietists, or at least global anti-realists. Now, it remains to be seen whether the technique of disavowing all ontological and metaphysical commitments is even coherent. I shall assume for the time being that it is. Still, would a quietist reject my utterly modest claim that there are truthmakers (and hence things to which we are ontologically committed)? If he does, I have him on a dilemma between an empty universe and an incoherent doctrine. Perhaps philosophers find realism inside quietism in the interest of charity, and rescuing the view from incoherence.

Regardless of whether one adopts a correspondence or deflationary account of truth, then, one is free to embrace either realist or anti-realist commitments. One's attitude with regard to truth does not determine one's attitude with regard to realism. Hence, we have established neutrality between (at least two prominent varieties of) truth and realism.<sup>14</sup> Still, one might feel duped after reading my last paragraph. Granted, says my objector, correspondence theories by themselves do not force realist commitments, but they *do* force realist commitments as soon as we accept any truths. And that is exactly right, and exactly what we should expect.<sup>15</sup> Correspondence theories make explicit the fact that any truth requires some sort of metaphysical commitment. Quine, recall, bridges truth and reality via his criterion of ontological commitment, not via his theory of truth. Correspondence theorists build the bridge directly by including within their theory of truth a theory of truthmakers (as I argued in section 2.4). Deflationism is more ontologically flexible, for it does not come with any theory of truthmakers already installed.

But denying that truth is substantive (while admitting that there are truths) does not, all by its lonesome, automatically leave one with a metaphysically thin worldview. If one wants to preserve the truth of a domain *and* be anti-realist about it—what Kit Fine (2001)

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<sup>14</sup>Coherence views of truth may very well be connected to various kinds of anti-realism, as our historical prelude suggests. Consider also the link between epistemic theories of truth and Dummettian anti-realism (though Horwich 1996 argues for neutrality even here). As my interest in the theory of truth is limited to correspondence, deflationary, and primitivist varieties, I am mainly interested in neutrality between realism and *those* theories of truth. Still, I suspect alongside Horwich that neutrality applies across the board.

<sup>15</sup>At the same time, consider what the NOAer might say, even if he embraced a correspondence theory of truth. 'There are electrons' is true. Therefore it corresponds to some fact. So what? If one doesn't believe in ontology in the first place, then I don't see how believing in a fact is any extra ontological commitment. Again, I doubt that rejecting ontology altogether is a coherent enterprise. Do they really think that nothing exists? Maybe they think things exist, of course, but that nothing *really exists in the World*. Here I recommend again the following existence schema: For all  $x$ ,  $x$  exists if and only if  $x$  *really exists in the World*.

calls “non-skeptical” anti-realism—it is not enough simply to embrace deflationism.<sup>16</sup>

Deflationism may very well *enable* such non-skeptical anti-realism, but it in no way entails it.

One also must argue, in order to secure one’s anti-realism, that the correct account of what makes the truths in some domain true is consistent with desert landscapes. Many writers in the metaethical literature have attempted to maintain a kind of anti-realism in the face of granting that there are moral truths (Blackburn, Allan Gibbard, Wright, and others).

Deflationary views of truth (or, at least, non-correspondence views) are a necessary ingredient in those enterprises because such philosophers require a theory of metaphysical and ontological commitment that will not force realist commitments, and deflationism by itself (unlike correspondence theories) is silent regarding metaphysical and ontological commitment. So one doesn’t earn one’s anti-realism by denying that *truth* is substantive; one must show instead that the metaphysical and ontological commitments of some domain fail to be metaphysically substantive (such that they are permissible for anti-realists). One must show, in other words, that the *truths themselves* fail to be substantive.

We are now in a position to diagnose why many have not recognized the truth of neutrality (see also Devitt 1991: 48-50). One of my main suggestions is that the theory of truth and the theory of truthmaking traditionally have not been distinguished adequately.

People see realism in correspondence theories of truth because they see inside it a weighty

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<sup>16</sup>It seems to be fairly common to claim otherwise, as if deflationism alone secured anti-realism. For instance, see Shafer-Landau 2003: 31, Azzouni 2006: 110, and Chrisman 2009: 9. Also note that Armstrong (2006) tentatively suggests equating truthmaker gaps with deflationism (245), and in turn (in his 2004) equating non-gaps with realism (5). Hence, he also seems to be thinking of deflationism and anti-realism going hand in hand. Horgan and Timmons 2006b seems to assume something similar. It seems to be a consequence of Wright’s approach to realism debates that deflationists cannot be realists (e.g., his 1988b, 1992, and 1995). I have difficulty making sense of Liggins’s claim that “It is said that we have the intuition [...] that the redundancy theory of truth is incompatible with realism” (2005: 103). Liggins cites no one who actually makes such a claim. Perhaps he has in mind some remarks found in Blackburn: “part of what is at stake in accepting Ramsey’s [redundancy] theory is whether there is a genuine issue over realism and anti-realism” (1980: 354). I do not know what an intuition is, but the one proposed here seems far-fetched, to say the least. Besides, even if “we” have such an intuition, we shouldn’t. It’s false.

theory of truthmaking and ontological commitment—truths are committed to the existence of worldly facts or entities, which serve as both correspondents and truthmakers. Hence they think realism can be avoided merely by eschewing correspondence. But eschewing correspondence is no rejection of the very notion of metaphysics and ontology—otherwise all deflationists would be quietists! Some deflationists would be happy with that conclusion (e.g., Horwich), but quietism is by no means required (as in Quine and Lewis). Deflationism, after all, is such a thin and meager theory. It is absolutely silent regarding the idea of truthmaking and ontological commitment, and hence neutral regarding the truth or falsity of realism.<sup>17</sup>

Following Horwich 1996, we can identify another reason why some have not recognized neutrality, namely, that many accounts of the nature of realism define it explicitly in terms of truth. For a small sample, see van Fraassen 1980, Leplin 1984, Railton 1986, and Sayre-McCord 1986. At first glance, such reliance may appear to be a violation of conceptual deflationism, the idea that truth is not connected conceptually to other notions, at least not in any way not accounted for by the logical and linguistic properties of truth that deflationists have identified. But recall our discussion in the previous chapter, where we found there to be concepts that rely on truth in a conceptually innocent way (as with knowledge and truthmaking), and concepts that may not (as with assertion). We cannot infer automatically from some concept being defined in terms of truth that conceptual deflationism has been violated.<sup>18</sup> In his 1996, Horwich shows how such statements of realism that are defined in

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<sup>17</sup>Just imagine: how could a series of T-biconditionals possibly dictate one's deepest metaphysical convictions? Recall the irony involved in admitting a deflationary theory of truth, but then thinking that the theory cannot handle all applications of the notion of truth, such as the role it plays in realism debates.

<sup>18</sup>Putnam seems to make the mistake of thinking otherwise (1982a: 196).

terms of truth can be handled easily by deflationists.<sup>19</sup> If, for instance, to be a realist is to think that theories aim at the truth, that amounts to no more than the fact that if snow is white, then theories aim to entail ‘Snow is white’, and if grass is green, then theories aim to entail ‘Grass is green’, and so forth.

Other reasons why many have admitted non-neutrality are historical (as above) and sociological. Dummett (1958-1959, 1982) attempts to reformulate the entire debate over realism by removing it from the realm of metaphysics and placing it squarely in the domain of the philosophy of language. Realism, for Dummett, is no metaphysical doctrine; rather, it is a semantic thesis, a view about how the truth predicate operates in various domains of discourse. Putnam (1978, 1981) did much to further the influence of Dummett’s semantic understanding of realism. Wright’s not entirely neutral discussion of truth and realism (1992) has also been very influential, as has been Fine’s work on the explicitly anti-neutral natural ontological attitude (1984a, 1984b, 1986). This is not the place to argue that all approaches to the topic of realism that put semantics before metaphysics are misguided (Devitt 1991 already has covered that ground rather considerably; see also Bigelow and Pargetter 1990). We shall engage such views when appropriate. In the meantime, I hope adequately to have demonstrated that we can make sense of realism independently of what position we stake out regarding truth. Consequently, I hope that much of what I say in the following pages regarding the debates between realists and anti-realists can be common ground between deflationists and substantivists. It would be unfortunate if one of those camps could not get on board with my approach to understanding realism.

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<sup>19</sup>But see my 2009, which argues that deflationists cannot accommodate Bas van Fraassen’s statement of scientific realism (together with the semantic conception of theories).

Now, in defending neutrality between *truth* and realism, I have been setting myself up for defending a rampant non-neutrality between *truthmaking* and realism. Truthmaker theory offers us an approach to the topic of metaphysical and ontological commitment, even if it does not offer us a theory of truth (or a criterion for ontological commitment directly analogous to Quine's).<sup>20</sup> As such, truthmaking can offer us a way of understanding where realist and anti-realist commitments lie. The suggestion, then, is that what divides realists and anti-realists is not their views regarding the nature of truth, but rather how they wield the notion of truthmaking.<sup>21</sup> Truthmaking is a metaphysical notion through and through. As such, it is a natural choice for a tool to employ in sorting out realism debates. We will do well to leave behind any suspicion that realism debates boil down to debates about the nature of truth. At bottom, so goes my suggestion, they are debates about truthmakers.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.2. Truthmaking and commitments ontological and metaphysical

Up until now in this chapter, I have spoken fairly loosely and freely in terms of ontological commitment, metaphysical commitment, and truthmaking. In this section I want to be much more specific as to how truthmaker theory relates to issues concerning ontological and metaphysical commitment. Some have argued that truthmaker theory offers a criterion of ontological commitment that is in competition with Quine's view on the subject (Heil 2003, Armstrong 2004, Liggins 2005, MacBride 2005, Cameron 2008c, Mellor 2009).

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<sup>20</sup>For the connections between truthmaking and ontological commitment—which we shall be taking up in the following pages—see Cameron 2008c and 2008d and Schaffer 2008b.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Blackburn: “in the philosophy of these things [i.e., realism debates], it is not what you end up saying, but how you get to say it, that defines your ‘ism’” (1993c: 7; see also his 1988: 363). I hesitate in attributing thoughts of truthmaking to Blackburn here (which he would surely deny), but his words nicely fit with our approach.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Pettit 1996: “The difference between what truth involves in the different [realist and anti-realist] areas will be explained by reference to the different subject-matters: the different truth-conditions, and the different truth-makers, in each discourse” (886).

Some think that truthmaker theory offers an account of ontological commitment that is consistent with Quine's criterion (Parsons 1999). Finally, some think that truthmaker theory offers no theory of ontological commitment at all (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000, Schaffer 2008b). My own view lies in the last camp, though I sympathize with the first.<sup>23</sup> Our approach to truthmaking is perfectly consistent with Quine's criterion, though it is up to something slightly different, but very close. Truthmaker theory, we might say, offers an account of *metaphysical commitment*. At the risk of multiplying labels (one should not multiply labels beyond necessity), I think that drawing a distinction between metaphysical and ontological commitment has important theoretical benefits. The goal of this section is to explain what those are.

#### 4.2.1. Quine on ontological commitment

Quine brought the notion of ontological commitment to philosophical consciousness in his seminal paper "On What There Is". There, Quine coins the slogan "To be is to be the value of a variable" (1948: 32). The idea is that one is ontologically committed to an entity

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<sup>23</sup>I do not sympathize with Parsons' view. Parsons thinks that "it would seem that one can be both a Quinean about ontological commitment, and endorse the truthmaker principle" (1999: 328). On its face, that claim is true, and something we are upholding in this project. But what Parsons means is that the original Quinean criterion can be understood as offering a theory of truthmakers, which is wrong. By 'truthmaker principle' Parsons means truthmaker maximalism. Parsons' claim is defensible only if he understands something by 'truthmaker' that we do not. For us, truthmakers are grounding necessitators of purely synthetic truths. Parsons defends his claim by suggesting a notion of a truthmaker for a sentence that is synonymous with the Quinean ontological commitments of a sentence. So *a* is a truthmaker for the contingent predication '*Fa*' in Parsons' sense, though not in ours. Hence, one can be both a Quinean about ontological commitment and endorse it as a truthmaker principle only if one renders the combination trivial by defining the truthmaker principle in terms of Quinean ontological commitment. Then of course the two are compatible. Or are they? On Parsons' idiosyncratic reading of the truthmaker principle, for every truth "there is some thing such that the sentence cannot become false without a qualitative change, a non-Cambridge change, in that thing" (1999: 327). What, then, is the truthmaker for *that there are no unicorns*, regimented as ' $\neg\exists xUx$ '? The Quinean says: that sentence has *no ontological commitments whatsoever*. What thing would Parsons have the Quinean point to in order to serve as the truthmaker (in Parson's sense) for our negative existential? The only option, it seems, would be to point vaguely at "the world" as a whole. But that is certainly *not* the Quinean ontological commitment required by  $\neg\exists xUx$  or any other negative existential. If the Quinean speaks of his ontological commitments as truthmakers, he should reject truthmaker maximalism, for negative existentials carry no ontological commitment, and hence have no truthmakers (in his sense).

just in case that entity falls into the domain of the quantifiers of the regimentation into first-order predicate logic of a theory that one accepts to be true. (The restriction of ontological commitment to theoretical regimentations is not yet found in Quine 1948, though it is present in Quine 1960.) Here is Quine:

The variables of quantification, ‘something’, ‘nothing’, ‘everything’, range over our whole ontology, whatever it may be; and we are convicted of a particular ontological presupposition if, and only if, the alleged presuppositum has to be reckoned among the entities over which our variables range in order to render one of our affirmations true. (1948: 32)

For any predicate  $F$  and any theory  $T$ ,  $T$  entails ‘ $\exists xFx$ ’ if and only if  $T$  is ontologically committed to there being  $F$ s. Specifically,  $T$  entails ‘ $Fa$ ’ only if  $T$  is ontologically committed to the existence of  $a$  (or, more precisely, what is denoted by ‘ $a$ ’). Since commitment follows quantification, we see that Quineans are committed only to particulars (those things that fill the universe of discourse, the ontological correlates to subject terms), and not to any ontological correlate to predicates. Thus, where  $T$  entails ‘ $Fa$ ’,  $T$  is committed to  $a$ , and to there being  $F$ s, but not to  $F$ ,  $F$ -ness, or anything else that might be supposed to “stand underneath” the predicate. In Armstrong’s words, Quine has here “stacked the ontological deck against predicates as opposed to subject terms” (2004: 23). Not surprisingly, Quine’s criterion fits well with an extreme nominalist metaphysics that rejects creatures like universals and tropes that are sometimes advocated as being the referents of (only certain) predicates.<sup>24</sup>

Ontology is the study of what exists. Quine’s criterion, in effect, says that the way to study ontology is to look at the domain of objects over which true theories quantify. What is

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<sup>24</sup>For an extended critical treatment of Quine’s criterion, see Azzouni 2004 and Rayo 2007. See also Lowe 2007, which argues that Quine “has nothing intelligible to say about ontology” (242). I would like to subscribe to the Quinean view, but I am troubled by the plainly Moorean fact that English allows for quantification over non-existent objects (e.g., ‘There are things that don’t exist’ and ‘God doesn’t exist’). See Lycan 1994 for a terrific exploration of the relevant issues here.

there? Everything: our ontology is fully exhausted by that over which we are willing to quantify. If I believe that there are horses, then I am ontologically committed to horses. If I believe that there is a God, then I am a committed theist. If goblins, ghosts, and gremlins are not a part of my ontology, then I must not quantify over them. Competing views like Azzouni's (2004, 2007) and Cameron's (2008c, 2010) allow for quantification over objects to which we are not ontologically committed. For Azzouni, if I believe that there are numbers, say, it is still an open question whether I am ontologically committed to the existence of numbers.<sup>25</sup> Hence, commitment does not follow from the quantifiers.<sup>26</sup> Truthmaker theorists also are in the business of ontological investigation. The idea driving truthmaker theory is that truths are grounded in the world—in the objects that populate the universe. We posit just enough truthmakers to ground the truths that we accept, and nothing more. As Armstrong notes, offering an exhaustive account of truthmakers constitutes offering an exhaustive metaphysics. Hence, many truthmaker theorists see themselves as engaged in giving a theory of ontological commitment: one is ontologically committed to all and only things that one takes to be truthmakers.

Now, I admit that one is ontologically committed to all and only things that one takes to be truthmakers. The reason why is that, as I have argued, *everything* is a truthmaker—for the truth that it exists, and perhaps others. It is impossible for something to exist, and yet not

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<sup>25</sup>Cameron's view is more distressing. He thinks that 'There are numbers' is true even though there aren't numbers. That unapologetic rejection of a T-sentence (and the accompanying contradiction) is not something to which Azzouni assents.

<sup>26</sup>Azzouni prefers employing an existence predicate to express ontological commitments, though he could just as well regiment his theories using two kinds of existential quantification—one committing, one non-committing. For a view that employs this last suggestion, see Hofweber 2000.

be a truthmaker. Furthermore, there are no truthmakers that do not exist.<sup>27</sup> (There isn't *anything* that doesn't exist.) The world just is the totality of truthmakers. Why, then, do I maintain that truthmaker theory is not a theory of ontological commitment?

The main answer is that truthmaker theory—at least in the way I employ it—is already presupposing Quine's criterion.<sup>28</sup> To see why, consider a dialectic between an Armstrongian who believes in states of affairs, a truthmaking trope theorist, and a Quinean nominalist. Let us say that they all agree to the following truth about some electron E:

(1) E is charged.

All take **1** to be true. (Set aside issues about regimentation for the moment. Suppose that **1** is simply regimented into 'Ce'.) But the three disagree as to what its truthmaker is. The Armstrongian thinks that a state of affairs makes **1** true: a complex object composed non-mereologically of the electron E and the universal *charge*. The truthmaking trope theorist thinks that what makes **1** true is a charge trope  $C_E$  that belongs to E. Quine himself doesn't ask the truthmaking question, but presumably he would say that **1**'s ontological commitment is to E, and E alone. There is no further truthmaking question.<sup>29</sup>

Truthmaker theorists have thus been inclined to see their views as competing with Quine's: Armstrong thinks **1** is ontologically committed to a state of affairs, the trope theorist thinks it's committed to a trope, and Quine thinks it's just committed to an electron. But notice that the disagreements here need not be over the ontological commitments of **1**. For

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<sup>27</sup>Which is not to say that we cannot use counterfactual truthmaking language. If Batman had existed, then he would have been a truthmaker for *that Batman exists*. That doesn't make Batman a truthmaker. He doesn't exist. But in possible worlds where he does, he is a truthmaker. Normally, then, my calling something a truthmaker is shorthand for calling it a truthmaker *in the actual world*. (The same goes, of course, for almost everything we ordinarily say.)

<sup>28</sup>My thanks to Bill Lycan for driving home this point to me. See also Schaffer 2008b.

<sup>29</sup>But see Lewis 2003, which tries to combine robust truthmaking theory with Quinean ontological scruples. Of course, traveling with Lewis down this path involves giving up some Quinean scruples about modality. No matter: who wants to live in a desert anyway?

notice that there are other truths in the neighborhood that are not accepted by all parties to the debate:

- (2) There is a state of affairs *charge*(E).
- (3) There is a charge trope  $C_E$ .

The Armstrongian accepts **2** but rejects **3**, and the trope theorist does the reverse. Quine rejects both.<sup>30</sup> Notice that **2** and **3** are themselves ordinary existential judgments. Here we have quantification over different kinds of objects, and it is precisely the truth of *these* quantified claims that is at issue between the competing truthmaker theorists. The lesson here is not that the different parties disagree as to the ontological commitments of **1**—they can all agree that **1** is committed to E and E alone—but that they disagree as to the truth of subsequent claims like **2** and **3**. What **2** and **3** reveal is that truthmaker theorists are already granting that commitments follow quantification, if indeed they use sentences like **2** and **3** in order to express their views. As Schaffer puts the point, “truthmaker commitments are parasitic upon quantifier commitments, and so the truthmaker view cannot possibly replace the quantifier view” (2008b: 16). After all, imagine what a completed truthmaker theory would look like: it would be a long list of existential claims. There is the truthmaker A, and the truthmaker B, and the truthmaker C, and so forth. The theory itself would employ quantification in order to say what truthmakers *there are*. It would quantify over the truthmakers there are, and no more. So orthodox truthmaker theory is already presupposing the orthodox view of ontological commitment.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Notice that Quine rejects **2** and **3** on independent grounds; he doesn’t reject them because of his criterion. That’s why to disagree with Quine about **2** and **3** is not necessarily to disagree with his criterion.

<sup>31</sup>It is open to the truthmaker theorist, then, to doubt Quine’s criterion on independent grounds, since the views are orthogonal. If a truthmaker theorist takes that route, then his quantifiers should not be assumed to carry ontological commitment. However the truthmaker theorist identifies ontological commitment (perhaps with Azzouni’s existence predicate), he must ensure that his commitments include all and only his truthmakers.

Now, that truthmaker theory (usually) presupposes the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment is no reason to suppose that truthmaker theory has no dispute with Quinean approaches to metaphysical inquiry. Truthmaker theorists do typically disagree with Quine; it's just that the disagreement is better understood in terms other than about the proper criterion of ontological commitment.<sup>32</sup> In particular, truthmaker theorists bring out the fact that what makes a truth true is not necessarily the same thing as its ontological commitments. The truthmakers and ontological commitments coincide for simple existentials, such as *that E exists*, but for few others (as we saw with **1**). Consider counterfactuals: the question of what makes them true is an important and difficult one; but the issue of what counterfactuals' Quinean commitments are is a non-starter, since they can't even be regimented into first-order logic. Negative existentials, to take another example, have *no* Quinean commitments, but the question of what makes them true is a live one.

As a result, truthmaker theorists do not think that all ontological questions with respect to some truth are settled once we figure out what its ontological commitments are. (*This* seems to be the real disagreement that truthmaker theorists have with Quinean metaphysics.) There is an important insight to be noticed here. Even if all parties to the table agree about the meaning of some statement (or about how it should be regimented into a formal language), they may disagree nonetheless about what makes it true, about what it is

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Since most truthmaker theorists seem to assume that quantifiers carry commitments, they are already assuming the Quinean view. Now, an interesting exception might be Cameron 2008c. Cameron seeks to deny, for example, that 'There are numbers' is made true by numbers. Cameron's view—as Schaffer also observes (2008b: 16)—requires a bifurcated view of quantification, such that the quantifiers sometimes carry commitments, and sometimes do not. So Cameron may not be assuming Quine's criterion (which is not to say that his view doesn't invite serious problems—see again Schaffer 2008b).

<sup>32</sup>Schaffer 2008b is an excellent discussion of how ontological commitment and truthmaking come apart, and contains several more arguments as to why the two are not one and the same. On the issue of truthmaker theory not being a theory of ontological commitment, I am in full agreement with Schaffer. Where I get off board with Schaffer's overall truthmaking program involves—at least for starters—his monism about truthmakers (2010).

that exists in the world that accounts for its truth. Metaphysical questions, in effect, are in no way resolved simply by answering semantic questions. Those who subscribe to truthmaker theory thus endorse the autonomy of metaphysical inquiry.<sup>33</sup> If metaphysical questions were exhausted by questions of ontological commitment, then Quine would have been right to “stack the deck” against predicates. But anyone who takes the metaphysics of properties seriously will recognize that there are inquiries worth exploring that go beyond the question of what something’s ontological commitments are.

I do not take the truthmaker theorist, then, to be in conflict with the Quinean criterion for ontological commitment. In what follows, I shall simply be assuming it. Nonetheless, I think truthmaker theorists do approach metaphysical inquiry quite differently.<sup>34</sup> Let us now consider some possible advantages that the truthmaker theorist has over the Quinean when it comes to engaging in metaphysical investigation.

First, the Quinean restriction to drawing out the ontological commitments only of regimentations into first-order predicate logic is far too constraining nowadays. Consider some of the questions the Quinean must reject: What are the ontological grounds of modal claims? What are the truthmakers for counterfactuals? What makes negative existentials true? What ontological commitments accompany the truths of (non-regimented) claims made in the vernacular? Here we seem to have different open roads of metaphysical inquiry that must be blocked off by the Quinean. The issue of what the truthmakers are for truths of necessity and possibility has long been of interest to truthmaker theorists; anyone who thought such a project worthwhile would be wise to leave behind Quine’s metaphysical methodology.

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<sup>33</sup>Herein lies the grain of truth in Cameron’s observation that the Quinean criterion takes “a wrong-turn: serious ontological questions are being decided by linguistic facts” (2008c: 5).

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Lewis: “I submit that, just as [Armstrong] has an unfamiliar notion of analysis, so he has an unfamiliar notion of ontology. *Pace* Quine, his question is not: what is there? But rather: what does it take to provide truthmakers for all the truths?” (1992: 216).

Further, counterfactuals have no place in first-order predicate logic (nor does any other non-material conditional), yet there is a substantive metaphysical project in determining what the ontological grounds for true counterfactuals are. Nor is it clear that ontological commitment cannot be found in ordinary, vernacular discourse.<sup>35</sup> Truthmaker theorists are not limited in locating their metaphysical commitments only within their preferred regimentations. Besides, where are the regimentations from which we derive our preferred ontologies? It seems that we can ask and answer metaphysical questions prior to undergoing the labor-intensive task of regimenting our preferred theories into first-order logic. Truthmaker theory is not constrained by such chores. It can seek to find the ontological presuppositions of ordinary discourse.

#### 4.2.2. Metaphysical commitments and discriminating propositions

In what follows, then, I shall understand by ‘ontological commitment’ precisely what Quine means; I shall continue to assume, in other words, that ontological commitment follows quantification. By ‘metaphysical commitment’ I mean something broader: one takes on a metaphysical commitment when one takes on a commitment as to a way that the world is. Metaphysics is the study of reality, and what’s real exhausts the way the world is. When we take on metaphysical commitments, we take the world to be one way rather than other; we rule out, in other words, certain possible worlds from being actual. Truthmaker theorists are interested in offering an account of *metaphysical* commitment. They think that certain metaphysical questions remain even after we settle the Quinean issue of what the ontological commitments are of what we take to be true. The methodology we have been assuming is the following: Starting with some truth we accept, we ask what it is in the world that makes it

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<sup>35</sup>See Azzouni 2007 for skepticism about locating ontological commitment outside of theoretical regimentations. (On this point Azzouni agrees with Quine.) I have argued elsewhere that ontological commitments are indeed expressible in the vernacular (2010).

true. If we deem the truth to have a truthmaker, we can equate that truthmaker with the truth's metaphysical commitments. If we deem the truth to be a truthmaker gap, we may still ask what serves as the ontological ground for that truth. Even if nothing properly necessitates it, it still may be true in virtue of the way the world is. Whatever that account involves we may also count as the metaphysical commitments of the truth. Metaphysical commitments track different ways the world may be. If we knew everything that is true, we would know everything there was to know about metaphysics, everything there was to know about the world. Truthmaker theorists are engaged in the project of understanding how the world is, and do so by investigating what the ontological grounds are for what is true.

In an earlier chapter, I identified the key idea underlying correspondence theories as the thought that truth was somehow tied to the world—it is precisely the worldliness of truth that makes correspondence theories seem correct, and I have argued that truthmaker theory is the better way to account for the natural idea that truths are connected to the world. The worldliness of truth, I said, consisted in the fact that truths accompany ontological and metaphysical commitments. Truths may have ontological and metaphysical commitments even when they do not have truthmakers. Again, assume that negative existentials like *that there are no Arctic penguins* have no truthmakers. They have no ontological commitments either. But they do have metaphysical commitments—their truth makes a difference to the world, and to our worldview when we believe them.

In order to better understand the idea of a truth “making a difference” to the world, let me introduce the term *discriminating proposition*.<sup>36</sup> A proposition is discriminating only if it divides the space of possible worlds in two: one set where the proposition is true, and another

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<sup>36</sup>Note that my choice of truth-bearers here is merely for convenience. I maintain my pluralistic neutrality about truth-bearers.

where the proposition is false. The proposition <There are penguins> divides the set of possible worlds in two: there are the worlds with penguins, and the worlds without. Necessarily true propositions and necessarily false propositions are non-discriminating. All contingent propositions are potentially discriminating. Assuming the truth of the law of non-contradiction, the two sets of worlds picked out by a discriminating proposition will not overlap. So any given contingent proposition can be used to generate two disjoint sets of possible worlds—call them the ‘T set’ of worlds for the ones where the proposition is true, and the ‘F set’ of worlds for the ones where the proposition is false.<sup>37</sup> But let me add another condition to the notion of a discriminating proposition. The truthmaker theorist’s idea is that for any two worlds, one from the T set and one from the F set, there must be some *metaphysical* difference between the two worlds. Obviously the two worlds disagree as to the truth of the proposition. But they must disagree about something else as well. For we are taking truth to be something that requires grounds—recall Schaffer’s observation that truth is not fundamental, it’s “*made* from the fundament” (2010: 310). Long before advocating truthmaker maximalism, or anything explicitly connected to his contemporary, systematic truthmaker theory, Armstrong succinctly captured this idea:

It seems obvious, furthermore, that for every true contingent proposition there must be something in the world (in the largest sense of 'something') that makes the proposition true. For consider any true contingent proposition, and imagine that it is false. We must automatically imagine some difference in the world. (1969: 23)

Now, different truthmaker theorists disagree as to what kind of difference that metaphysical difference has to be. Bigelow (1988) thinks that any T world and any F world must disagree about something that exists—all metaphysical differences are ontological differences, in other words. Armstrong agrees. Lewis (1992, 2001b) thinks that any T world and any F

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<sup>37</sup> The T set and the F set may not be exhaustive if some propositions are truth-value-less in some possible worlds (if, for example, they include non-denoting terms in such worlds).

world must disagree either about something that exists, or, in case the two worlds agree on what exists, about the properties those objects have or the relations that obtain between them.<sup>38</sup> What is objectionable to the truthmaker theorist is the suggestion that there might be a contingent truth that nevertheless did not discriminate in one of those ways. A discriminating proposition, then, is one that cleaves the space of possible worlds into two non-overlapping sets, such that any pair of worlds from each admits of a metaphysical difference. When a proposition is discriminating, its truth or falsity allows for some sort of metaphysical accountability. We can trace the truth or falsity of a proposition to the difference that it makes in the world. The traditional worry about behaviorist and phenomenalist theories was that they posited certain counterfactuals as being true, even though their truth seemed in no way to reflect anything about the world. Their truth was not held metaphysically accountable. The only option left seems to be that their truth is simply metaphysically brute—it is taken to be fundamental.

Philosophers—those interested in metaphysics, anyway—have long disagreed as to what is most fundamental. Truthmaker theorists are quite disinclined to take truths as fundamental: truths owe their truth to something else, and it is the truthmaker theorist’s task to say just what. Armed with this view, a truthmaker theorist might be inclined to reject out of hand any theory that posited certain truths as being metaphysically brute. I do not wish to be quite so dogmatic. Perhaps some truths are fundamental. Every theory has its primitives, and its choice of primitives is just one factor among many to consider when the various theoretical advantages and disadvantages that accompany every philosophical theory are

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<sup>38</sup>Here again we have the two versions of the “supervenience” principle—see section 1.3.1. I think we can present the idea without invoking the disputed term ‘supervenience’. Some (e.g., Schaffer 2010) are quite skeptical that a mere supervenience relation is sufficient to support the theoretical work required by a truthmaking theorist. I tend to agree.

weighed.<sup>39</sup> Hence, I think that the truthmaker theorist's proper response to a view like Lange's (2009) that takes certain counterfactuals as being brute is not outright dismissal (on the charge of "cheating" or "violating the truthmaker principle"), but cautious and open-minded skepticism. To the extent that someone is attracted to truthmaker theory, one should be suspicious of ungrounded truths. But one should not refuse to engage such theories. Like all truthmaker theorists, I believe that some truths accompany metaphysical commitments—that truths are discriminating, we may now say. But whether *all* contingent truths are discriminating is another matter, and one I shall not assume (nor does anyone in the industry have an argument for it). I think that being open to the possibility that there are non-discriminating truths might help make sense of certain issues about realism, and admitting their possibility is not in and of itself a rejection of the insights that motivate truthmaker theory. Everyone, after all, is committed to there being truthmakers. The interesting question is just how far and wide truthmaking considerations apply.<sup>40</sup>

Truthmaker theorists tend to be committed to the idea that all contingent propositions are discriminating.<sup>41</sup> Take the proposition <There are penguins>. Take one of its T worlds and one of its F worlds. For any such pair, there will be a metaphysical difference between them—one will have a penguin and the other won't. The same can be said of the proposition <There are no Arctic penguins>, or <Obama is president>. In the latter case, the actual world differs from every F world either in that Obama does not exist in those worlds, or that he does but is not president. Hence, maximalists like Armstrong and non-maximalists like Bigelow and Lewis can agree that all contingent propositions are discriminating. For even if

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<sup>39</sup>See Goodman 1954: 37.

<sup>40</sup>For Lange's own response to the possible charge of ontological cheating, see his 2009: 188-189.

<sup>41</sup>Cameron expresses something similar by his principle of the "substantiality of contingency" (2010: 412).

<There are no Arctic penguins> has no truthmaker, it most certainly is a discriminating proposition. Hence we see non-maximalists like Bigelow and Lewis proudly adopt truthmaker theory in spite of rejecting maximalism.<sup>42</sup> The core idea behind truthmaker theory—that truths carry metaphysical commitments—is now captured by the idea that contingent propositions are discriminating. When propositions are discriminating, their truth or falsity is held metaphysically accountable, thus satisfying the demand that truths be grounded in the world—that they owe their truth to something else.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Azzouni and non-discriminating truthmaker gaps

If I have presented the above ideas compellingly, it might seem mysterious why anyone would accept the idea that a contingent proposition could be non-discriminating. What would it be for a proposition to be true, even though its truth made no difference to the way the world was? Here we have hit upon what Azzouni calls a widespread assumption that has “powerfully shaped philosophy for a very long time” (2006: 3). Azzouni labels the assumption ‘the truthmaker assumption’, and thinks that it has had a tight grip on metaphysics, regardless of whether its practitioners have self-consciously labored under the banner of truthmaking. Azzouni is interested in the possibility that the truthmaker assumption is wrong. Rejecting that assumption allows one to embrace that possibility that “truth vehicles can be true without there being a metaphysical trace in the world that their truth reflects” (Azzouni 2006: 5). Azzouni, in other words, happily embraces the existence of truths that are non-discriminating: their truth leaves no trace in the world. Neither, then, does

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<sup>42</sup>But see MacBride 2005, which argues that Lewis ultimately “has come to damn the truthmaker principle with faint praise” (139).

<sup>43</sup>Excepting, recall, the cases of reflexive truthmaking. These are still grounded, though they provide their own grounds by, in effect, being about themselves in the right way.

their falsity. When we have a non-discriminating proposition, it seems that we can have two worlds such that they differ in no metaphysical respect—they agree on what exists, and on what (natural) properties those things have and what relations obtain between them—but yet differ over the truth of the proposition. Such propositions can admit of no metaphysical grounds—anything on offer would equally be on offer in the qualitatively identical world where it's false. It would just be a brute fact in the T world that the proposition was true, and a brute fact in the F world that the proposition was false. If this situation seems puzzling (or just downright unbelievable), count yourself among those attracted by truthmaking.

Azzouni's striking view here fits well with another controversial view of his—the anti-Quinean thesis that the quantifiers do not accompany ontological commitment (2004). Hence, there can be true existential propositions—such as <There are numbers>—even though numbers are nowhere to be found in the ontological inventory of the world. Azzouni locates ontological commitments by employing an existence predicate; whatever makes it into the existence predicate of a fully regimented theory is what we're ontologically committed to when we are committed to the truth of the theory. If we use 'EXIST' to denote that predicate, we can express Azzouni's view by saying that he thinks there exist things that do not EXIST. Sure, <There are numbers> quantifies over numbers, but only <There are numbers that EXIST> is ontologically committed to there being numbers.

Despite its unorthodox nature, the benefits of Azzouni's view are easy to see. If the truth of mathematics is indispensable to the practice of science, as Quine (1948) and Putnam (1971) have famously argued, then belief in some scientific theory will involve all of the ontological commitments of the mathematics that the theory presupposes. Since mathematics quantifies over entities such as sets, the Quinean criterion entails that any theory that

incorporates mathematics is ontologically committed to sets. Sets, of course, are anathema to nominalists. Hence an advantage of Azzouni's view is that the truth of mathematics, even with its quantification over sets, does not entail the *real* existence of mathematical entities. Azzouni's view is tailor-made for those who seek to quantify over sets, numbers, or whatever without being ontologically committed to them. Others are forced either to reject the indispensability of the truth of mathematics (Field 1980), or begrudgingly accept with Quine the existence of mathematical entities. Azzouni need not face such a choice. Azzouni's view is also of use in solving puzzles regarding fictional entities, non-existent "entities", and other cases where there are truths about things that do not exist. Azzouni can grant the truth of <There exist fictional ducks, such as Donald and Howard> without being ontologically committed to fictional ducks. If we can have existential truth without any accompanying ontology, then we can maintain a robust nominalism without running error theories on many natural domains of discourse.

Azzouni, then, would have us separate the following propositions:

- (4) <There are numbers>
- (5) <There are numbers that EXIST>

For convenience, let us call **4** an *existential proposition*, and **5** an *ontological proposition*. Azzouni might be prepared to acknowledge that **4** is what we are calling a non-discriminating proposition. **5** is ontologically committing, and so presumably is discriminating. But Azzouni rejects **5** as false—the indispensability of mathematics requires us to countenance the truth only of **4**.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>What turns out to be indispensable about mathematics, then, is not any mathematical *ontology*, but just mathematical *truth*.

In fact, **4** and **5** are actually poor test cases for our interests, since they may well not be contingencies, and hence are non-discriminating simply by way of being necessary. So consider instead the following pair, which are also perfectly separable on Azzouni's view:

(**6**) <There are penguins>

(**7**) <There are penguins that EXIST>

Let me go out on a limb and say that both **6** and **7** are true: penguins belong inside our ontologies. Nevertheless, **6** and **7** are distinct claims, the latter being logically stronger. What I am interested in are those possible worlds where **7** is false. These are worlds where penguins never evolved in the first place. But **7**'s being false is compatible with either the truth or falsity of **6**. If **7** falls, **6** doesn't have to go down with it, for the two are logically distinct. Here is the puzzle: among those worlds where **7** is false, what is the difference between those worlds where **6** is true, and those worlds where **6** is false? In worlds like ours where **7** is true, there is no puzzle about the truth of **6**. **7** entails **6**, and **7** is properly discriminating. Penguins tell the difference between **7**'s T worlds and its F worlds. The truth of **6** is entailed by the truth of **7**. But the question, really, is what makes **6** true in those worlds where **7** is false, but **6** is nevertheless true. There won't be any penguins around to do the job. One option is to say that **6** is actually a necessary truth, and so we need not account for its truth by any special means in worlds where **7** is false. I find it deeply implausible that all existential propositions like **6** are necessary truths, so I find this an unstable resting spot for Azzouni. The other option, which is in the spirit of Azzouni's view, is to take **6** to be a contingent, but non-discriminating proposition. In those worlds where **7** is false, the truth-value of **6** is just a brute fact. Since all other contingent existential propositions will follow suit, Azzouni seems committed to the view that all existential propositions that are not

explicitly ontological (for they involve no use of the existence predicate) are non-discriminating. As such, they violate the maxim that truth supervenes on being, and stand as potential counterexamples to truthmaker theorists.<sup>45</sup>

Picking up on that last point, we can see quite easily that if there are true, contingent, non-discriminating propositions, then those truths are truthmaker gaps. For suppose that <Mickey Mouse exists> is contingently true, but is non-discriminating. As a result, there is a possible world *W* qualitatively identical to the actual world—that is, a world that bears no metaphysical difference to ours in the sense described above—where the proposition is false. Now suppose that the proposition has a truthmaker, *T*. *T* also exists in *W*, and so the proposition is true in *W* after all, contradicting our initial assumption. So any contingently true non-discriminating proposition is a truthmaker gap, a truth without a truthmaker.

In an ecumenical spirit, I have been presenting Azzouni's view rather than arguing against it. Indeed, we are not assuming maximalism, so the existence of more truthmaker gaps is no objection in and of itself. But I could very well have launched a dilemma: either existential propositions like <There are penguins> are necessary, or they are ungrounded. Either way, the view seems to be implausible. Azzouni may well simply charge me with begging the question: the reason why I find his view implausible is simply that I am assuming the very assumption—what he calls the truthmaker assumption—which he has already explicitly rejected. So I do not take myself to be arguing definitively against the view that there are non-discriminating contingent propositions (even when those propositions are existentials). Moreover, I want to put such truths (be there any) to theoretical use later as a

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<sup>45</sup>Another option for Azzouni might be to take the truth of **6** to be “up to us”, as detailed in Azzouni and Bueno 2008. But then such truths would be discriminating after all—their truth would depend upon the existence of certain choices made by cognitive creatures like us—and thus would not actually violate the truthmaker assumption.

way of understanding some forms of anti-realism. So let us assume in what follows that there might well be contingent non-discriminating propositions, and see what comes of it.

We are now in a position to appreciate that not all truthmaker gaps are created equal. Consider yet again the famous case of negative existentials. ‘There are no unicorns’ is true, but not, perhaps, because of the existence of something. Rather, ‘There are no unicorns’ is true because *nothing* of a certain kind exists.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, ‘There are no unicorns’ is discriminating in our sense. Take any world where ‘There are no unicorns’ is true, and any world where it is false, and we can locate a metaphysical difference between them: one has unicorns, the other does not. Hence, even if ‘There are no unicorns’ does not have a truthmaker, it is no counterexample to the supervenience principle advocated by Bigelow and Lewis, for it accompanies metaphysical commitments in our sense (though it has no Quinean ontological commitments). Because our world belongs among the no-unicorn worlds, ‘There are no unicorns’ is true. Just as is the case with truths that have truthmakers, we can account for the truths by way of metaphysical analysis and description. Negative existentials admit of the same metaphysical accountability that non-truthmaker gaps do. We cite things that do or do not exist, and the features that those things do or don’t have. Hence, when we grant the truth of certain truthmaker gaps like negative existentials, we still take on certain metaphysical commitments. In Schaffer’s language, we find something in the “fundament” out of which to construct their truth. Positing truthmakers is not the only way to hold a theorist’s feet to the ontological fire. For example, since I believe ‘There are no unicorns’ to be true, I have ruled out an infinity of possible worlds as being actual. In taking on this “atheism” about unicorns, I take on a decisive metaphysical stand about one aspect of how

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<sup>46</sup>To put the point bluntly, to be an *atheist* about something is not to be a *theist* about something else, as the maximalist has it.

the world is.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, I am in no way taking the truth to be metaphysically brute. Truthmaker gaps are not necessarily devoid of metaphysical substance, here understood as bearing certain metaphysical commitments, even if there is no particular entity whose existence guarantees their truth.

But now consider other truthmaker gaps that philosophers have posited. There are Lange's counterfactuals (2009). The laws of nature are true in virtue of those counterfactuals' being true, and not the other way round. But no truthmakers for the counterfactuals are then offered. Azzouni advocates the truth of mathematical claims—including existential sentences like 'There are numbers'—without thinking that anything must exist to make them true (2004). Sorensen employs ungrounded truthmaker gaps to solve the sorites paradox, the no-no paradox, and issues involving vagueness (2001, chapter 11). In all these various cases, philosophers have posited the existence of truthmaker gaps that do not owe their truth to anything about the world, lack any metaphysical substance whatsoever, and hence falsify the supposed supervenience of truth on being. Such truthmaker gaps are non-discriminating—their truth makes no difference to the world.

To take another example (one of Sorensen's), consider the liar sentence's less disruptive cousin, the truth-teller:

**(TT)** This sentence is true.

The interesting thing about the truth-teller is not that it is inconsistent like the liar, but rather that it can consistently bear either truth-value. If **TT** is true, then **TT** is true. No trouble there. If **TT** is not true, then it's not the case that **TT** is true. No trouble there, either. Sorensen

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<sup>47</sup>One thing that strikes me as missing from the Quinean approach to ontology is its inevitable inattention to negative metaphysical commitments. Neither the agnostic nor the atheist quantifies over any deity, so neither is ontologically committed to any god. But if metaphysicians merely attend to what we will or won't quantify over, they will miss the fundamental metaphysical distinction between atheistic and agnostic metaphysical views. I elaborate on this theme in my 2010.

suggests that we treat **TT** as a truthmaker gap, but as a non-discriminating truthmaker gap. On such a view, **TT** may well be true. It may be false. It has a truth-value, but no truthmaker or falsemaker. As a result, Sorensen thinks we have an explanation of why we cannot know its truth-value—it is an “epistemic island” whose truth-value cannot be known by us. Suppose that **TT** is in fact true. If so, and there is nothing about the world that accounts for its truth, then there is a possible world metaphysically indiscernible from ours—all the same stuff exists, and that stuff has all the same properties and stands in the same relations they stand in here—but where **TT** is false. After all, **TT**’s truth (or falsity) in no way depends upon the world. Sorensen’s point is that we have no idea whether the actual world belongs among **TT**’s T worlds or its F worlds. For each world in one of the sets, we can find a qualitatively identical one in the other—their only disagreement will be about the truth-value of **TT**. My point here is not to refute the existence of such truths, but rather to call attention to what they would be like, if in fact there are any.<sup>48</sup>

The first step in articulating an adequate metaphysics of truthmaker gaps is to recognize the distinction between truthmaker gaps like negative existentials on the one hand, whose truth is still grounded in the world, and the other kinds of posited gaps on the other, where the truths do not appear to be grounded in reality at all. A hard-nosed truthmaker maximalist might reject that there is any real distinction here, because he finds the metaphysical accounting attached to the first kind just as empty as the refusal to offer any such metaphysical accounting in the second kind. Unless there is some particular *thing* that makes some truth true, we have no adequate ontological accounting of the truth’s truth.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup>See Williamson 2007: 725-726 for criticism of Sorensen’s view here.

<sup>49</sup>This is the view of Cameron 2008d: 107-108. Cameron, in effect, simply equates “being grounded” with “having a truthmaker”.

non-maximalist demurs: no, we have a perfectly good ontological account of the truth's truth, even though there is no particular thing that guarantees its truth. But supposing we may take non-maximalism seriously, and thus believe that some truths are properly metaphysically grounded in spite of having no truthmaker, we open the door to exploring the contrast between truthmaker gaps that are grounded in reality, and those that are not. Herein, I think, lies some insight into what is at stake in the various divides between realism and anti-realism that occur across the philosophical landscape. Perhaps one form of anti-realism about the truths in some domain is not just to accept that those truths are truthmaker gaps, but that those truths make no difference as to how the world is. After all, if the truths in some domain are not grounded in *reality*, then we seem free to reject *realism* about that domain. Other truthmaker gaps—negative existentials being the paradigm example—do admit of some kind of metaphysical accountability, and hence do not seem in any way indicative of anti-realism. Equipped with these insights, we can now turn to a truthmaker based approach to the topic of realism and anti-realism.

#### 4.3. A truthmaker account of realism

Where others have found the nature of truth to be crucial to understanding the nature of realism, I find the nature of truthmakers to be the crucial element. Truthmaker theory is an explicitly metaphysical enterprise—it seeks after the ontological grounds for truths—and as such is a more suitable candidate for being able to articulate the gulf that lies between realists and their opponents. What I would now like to do is offer an approach to the question of realism that is framed in terms of *truthmaker* theory, not the theory of *truth*.

The connection between truthmaking and realism is obvious enough to have been noticed already. John Bigelow, in an oft-quoted passage, writes that

I have sometimes tried to stop believing in the Truthmaker axiom. Yet I have never really succeeded. Without some such axiom, I find I have no adequate anchor to hold me from drifting onto the shoals of some sort of pragmatism or idealism. And that is altogether uncongenial to me; I am a congenital realist about almost everything. (1988: 123)

John Heil, following Charlie Martin, writes that the core truthmaking idea that “when a statement concerning the world is true, there must be something about the world that makes it true” is “a central tenet of realism” (2003: 61). Armstrong and Cameron, as we shall see next, also draw close connections between realism and truthmaker theory. Indeed, no one is shocked that truthmaker theory has thrived in Australia, not unknown for its hospitality toward realism. Still, I do not think that anyone has correctly articulated what the relationship between realism and truthmaking is, and it is that deficit that I would like to remedy.

Furthermore, the above quotes all suggest that truthmaker theory is exclusive territory for *realists*. While I think realism is best understood in terms of truthmakers, this is not because only realists are entitled to take a stand on truthmakers. Michael Pendlebury, critical of the thought that truthmaker theory is essentially realist, writes that the “realism of the Truthmaker Program is an uncritical article of faith that is simply taken for granted” (2010: 145).

This chapter challenges that article of faith, and shows how truthmaker theory is safe territory for anti-realists. The best way of understanding the divide between realists and anti-realists involves understanding their dividing views about truthmakers and truthmaking.

#### 4.3.1. Truthmaking and realism: Armstrong

Almost in passing, Armstrong writes that “To demand truthmakers for particular truths is to accept a *realist* theory for these truths” (2004: 5). Elsewhere he defines “*realism* about the truth of a particular true proposition as the contention that its truth is determined by something that lies *outside* that proposition”, the plausibility of which he then takes to be the “charter” of truthmaker theory (2003: 12). Here we have an elegantly simple account of the relationship between truthmaking and realism:

- (**R<sub>1</sub>**) To be a realist with respect to a set of true propositions is to hold that those propositions all have truthmakers.

According to this account, wherever truthmakers are found, so too is realism. Presumably, whatever makes a proposition true also makes that proposition’s negation false, and so we can adopt this slightly broader statement of Armstrong’s view:

- (**R<sub>2</sub>**) To be a realist with respect to a set of propositions is to hold that all the true propositions in the set have truthmakers, and that all the false propositions in the set have falsemakers.<sup>50</sup>

**R<sub>2</sub>** provides a more satisfying formulation, for it allows us to speak about realism for an entire domain of propositions (e.g., science or ethics) rather than just for a set of truths. Moral realists, for instance, are just as realist about the falsity of their falsehoods as they are about the truth of their truths.

Armstrong’s identification of realism and the doctrine that truths have truthmakers is, unfortunately, too quick. First, consider the fact that Armstrong himself accepts *truthmaker maximalism*, the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker (and, thus, that every falsehood has a falsemaker) (2004: 5). Hence, Armstrong is by his own lights a global realist—he is a realist about every domain of discourse (or, at least, every domain of discourse where he finds any

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<sup>50</sup>The notion of a falsemaker hasn’t come up, but can be defined in exact parallel fashion to how we have defined what a truthmaker is using **TM**.

truth or falsity at all). Now, Armstrong may *be* a global realist, but the real issue is whether commitment to truthmaker maximalism alone ought to commit one to global realism.

According to **R<sub>2</sub>**, one cannot be a maximalist and yet be an anti-realist about some domain of claims, so long as those claims are truth-valued. The only non-globalist alternative for the maximalist is to take a non-cognitive stance toward some domain of claims; by ‘non-cognitive’ here I mean views like Ayer’s emotivism that deny that ethical and religious judgments bear a truth-value (1952). **R<sub>2</sub>** rightly categorizes such non-cognitivist views as a form of anti-realism, but the problem is that it makes it the *only* form of anti-realism that the maximalist has available. We should hope for a more flexible understanding of the nature of realism, given the great abundance of other anti-realist options.<sup>51</sup>

A second problem is that error theorists turn out to be realists, according to maximalists who adopt **R<sub>2</sub>**. For error theory (e.g., Mackie 1977 and Field 1980) is typically understood as an anti-realist view that holds that the propositions of a domain are systematically false. According to maximalists, those falsehoods have falsemakers, just as their negations have truthmakers. So the error theorist turns out to be a realist after all. So **R<sub>2</sub>** suffers from a categorization defect.

A third problem with **R<sub>2</sub>** involves its commitment to all truthmakers being realism-relevant. In other words, **R<sub>2</sub>** supposes that truthmakers automatically carry realism in tow. If we are realists with respect to some proposition *p*, we think it has some truthmaker *T*. That we believe in the existence of *T* and take it to be a truthmaker for *p* is enough for being

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<sup>51</sup>Blackburn offers a nice catalog of the various competitors to realism that have surfaced over the years: “Realists are contrasted with a variety of alleged opponents: reductionists, idealists, instrumentalists, pragmatists, verificationists, internalists, neo-Wittgensteinian neutralists, and no doubt others” (1984b: 145). We could add to the list quietists, expressivists, fictionalists, nominalists, semantic anti-realists, conventionalists, non-cognitivists, constructivists, relativists, intuitionists, subjectivists, quasi-realists, non-factualists, error theorists, and probably still others.

realist about  $p$ , according to  $\mathbf{R}_2$ . We don't need to know anything else about T. The possibility that  $\mathbf{R}_2$  is closing off here is that anti-realists, too, may avail themselves of truthmakers, albeit anti-realism-relevant ones. According to  $\mathbf{R}_2$ , truthmaker theory is strictly realist territory; anti-realists are not invited to play along.

However, we can make perfect sense of anti-realist truthmaking accounts. Suppose I hold a particularly abhorrent metaethical view, according to which something is good just in case I desire it, and that everything I do not desire is bad. Now, this is not a kind of relativism—what's good for me is what I desire, and what's good for you is what you desire. No, this view is that *what it is to be good* is to be desired by *me*. According to this view, the proposition that echidnas are good is true, and made true by my desire for echidnas. The proposition that tapirs are bad is also true, this time made true by my absence of a desire for tapirs. To put it lightly, I would hesitate to call this view a form of moral realism, despite its providing truthmakers for moral judgments.

Other far more tenable forms of anti-realism also are able to offer truthmakers to ground their theories. Constructivist metaethical theories, for example, might hold that moral judgments are true in virtue of the decisions of a set of ideal observers (e.g., Milo 1995). Just what the ontological status of those decisions is is a good question, of course, but we can see how they don't have the obvious realist flavor that accompanies traditional realist accounts of moral truthmakers (such as moral facts, divine commands, or natural facts about flourishing, etc.). Or consider the case of fashion. Some things are fashionable; other things are not. We do not need to be fashion realists to find truthmakers for claims about what is or isn't fashionable.<sup>52</sup> It might be true that some dress is fashionable simply in virtue of the event of its being worn to the Oscars. Working out in detail an account of truthmakers for fashion

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<sup>52</sup>Cf. López de Sa 2010, which offers an account of relativist truth in terms of response-dependent truthmakers.

discourse may be fairly complicated, but it should be clear that giving an account of what makes fashion judgments true or false is not automatically to concede a realist account of fashion. Fashion discourse does not bear the traditional marks of objectivity with which we characterize realist domains, even though we may be able to say exactly what it is that makes fashion judgments true or false.<sup>53</sup>

My third objection boils down to the thought that realism does not consist in *whether or not* the truths of some domain have truthmakers, but rather what the *nature* or *character* is of those truthmakers. Having truthmakers is not alone sufficient for realism. If we want to leave open the possibility that there are anti-realist accounts of truthmaking for certain domains, then we need to reject **R**<sub>2</sub>.

My final objection to **R**<sub>2</sub> is that just as having truthmakers is not sufficient for realism, it is not necessary either. One can be a realist about a particular domain even if one thinks that not all the truths of that domain have truthmakers. This objection relies on the tenability of there being *truthmaker gaps*—truths without truthmakers. Consider yet again those wily negative existentials. It is true that there are no Arctic penguins. Here we have a proposition that seems to be true in virtue of *nothing* of a certain kind existing, not in virtue of *something* of a certain kind existing. Now, I continue to maintain that it is an open question whether negative existentials are genuine counterexamples to maximalism. For our purposes, we need only make two observations. First, one can still engage in truthmaker theory even without

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<sup>53</sup>See also Cameron's discussion of Berkeley, whom he takes to be an anti-realist in spite of having truthmakers available to him (2008d: 118-122). Berkeley's idealism consists in the (mind-dependent) nature of the objects that he has available as truthmakers.

being a maximalist.<sup>54</sup> Second, to take some truths to be truthmaker gaps is not automatically to concede a form of anti-realism with respect to them.

To illustrate both claims, we can simply look again to Bigelow, who, recall, admits to being a “a congenital realist about almost everything” (1988: 123). Bigelow is not a maximalist. He thinks that truthmaker theory is best captured by a weaker thesis, that truth supervenes on being. If some true proposition had been false, then either something that does exist wouldn’t have existed, or something that doesn’t exist would have. For example, had it turned out that the proposition that there are no Arctic penguins had been false, then something that doesn’t exist (namely, an Arctic penguin) would have to have existed. Now, Bigelow is no anti-realist when it comes to penguin discourse, in spite of his taking the discourse to include truthmaker gaps. Bigelow is not moved by idealism or pragmatism when it comes to truths involving Arctic wildlife. What explains the distinction between truths with truthmakers and truths without is not necessarily one having anything to do with realism and anti-realism. We shall meet below some anti-realist theories that do rely crucially on positing truths without truthmakers. But not all truthmaker gaps are created equal, as the case of negative existentials makes manifest. Just as some but not all truthmakers are indicative of realism, some but not all truthmaker gaps are indicative of anti-realism.

#### 4.3.2. Truthmaking and realism: Cameron

Armstrong’s identification of realism with the mere having of truthmakers is too simple to be true. A set of truths having truthmakers is neither necessary nor sufficient for counting as realist. We need a more subtle account that takes to heart the idea that it is the

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<sup>54</sup>Armstrong even observes that most truthmaker theorists reject maximalism (2006: 245).

*nature* of the truthmakers that matters, not merely their existence. Cameron (2008d: 122)

offers an account of realism in the spirit of truthmaker theory that satisfies this requirement:

- (R<sub>3</sub>) To be a realist with respect to a set of propositions is (i) to think that the propositions of the domain are, when literally construed, literally true or false, (ii) to think that some propositions of the domain are non-vacuously literally true, and (iii) to think that the grounds of those true propositions exist/obtain mind-independently (and that this fact is itself a mind-independent matter).

Cameron borrows the first two conditions from Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's account of realism (1986: 5), and adds the third to fix what he (correctly) identifies as an insufficiency in Sayre-McCord's account. Plenty of anti-realists nowadays uphold the existence of (literal, non-vacuous) truths to be found inside the domains they take to be anti-realist. Consider constructivists (social or not), relativists, subjectivists, and idealists. Crispin Wright (1992) goes to great lengths to show how to uphold truth inside anti-realist domains. Quasi-realists like Blackburn (1998) are notorious for finding truth and anti-realism compatible.

Contemporary expressivists also accept the existence of truth in their expressivist domains (Field 1994b, Gibbard 2003). On Cameron's account, what sets these views off as anti-realist must involve their taking the grounds for anti-realist truths to be a mind-dependent matter.

I have said that our account of realism needs to countenance the fact that it is the *nature* of one's stock of truthmakers that matters for whether a domain counts as realist or not. Cameron accounts for that fact by maintaining that realists require *mind-independent* entities as grounds for truths, while anti-realists may help themselves to *mind-dependent* entities as grounds for truth.<sup>55</sup> Mind-independence is the feature that makes an entity relevant

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<sup>55</sup>Cameron speaks of grounds rather than truthmakers here because he is being sensitive to the idea that grounds need not be truthmakers (i.e., entities that necessitate the truth of propositions). One might think that, in line with my final objection in the previous section, he is not trying to rule out as anti-realists non-maximalists like Bigelow who might take negative existentials to be grounded in some sense while not having truthmakers. But that is not at all obvious, for Cameron claims quite boldly that truths without truthmakers are ungrounded (2008a: 412 and 2008d: 107).

to realism or anti-realism. To make good on this account, we of course would need to offer a theory of just what it is in which mind-independence consists, which is no easy matter.

Neither Cameron nor I have such an account, but I for one am confident that the notion is a genuine one that, while perhaps vague, admits of clear positive and negative cases.<sup>56</sup>

Equipped with condition (iii), we can properly categorize a number of anti-realist positions as such. For the moral relativist, moral claims are true in virtue of the existence of certain social norms, which in turn only exist due to the conventions of the society in question. The Berkeleyan idealist thinks that truths are true in virtue of mind-dependent entities like minds and ideas. The constructivist philosopher—in ethics, mathematics, or wherever—holds that constructed truths are true in virtue of their being constructed, where what's doing the constructing is mental agents like us. For Wright, one form of anti-realism involves the claims in a domain being true in virtue of their being superassertible—in virtue of their being warranted, and continuing to be warranted under arbitrary improvements of information (1992). Here, truths are true in virtue of their possessing certain epistemic features about us; they are true in virtue of *our* being warranted in believing them in a certain way. The notion of mind-dependence does a good job of capturing what seems to unite anti-realist views. Each of these views hold that *we* are responsible in a crucial way for the truth of various sets of propositions. In understanding what makes certain propositions true, we need to understand what role we play in making them true. Such is one of the key ideas behind anti-realism.

Cameron's view is a significant improvement over Armstrong's. But it still does not capture everything there is to the debate between realists and anti-realists. Just how much it

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<sup>56</sup>See Devitt 1984 and 1991 and Jenkins 2005 for treatments of mind-independence. Rosen 1994 raises worries about the legitimacy of the notion, as well as its cousin objectivity. See Fine 1986 for an example of how *not* to understand mind-independence, and Musgrave 1989 for an explanation of where Fine goes wrong.

fails to capture depends in part on how we are to understand the parenthetical clause of condition (iii). Cameron writes that the realist about some domain thinks that the grounds for the truths of the domain exist mind-independently, and that this fact is itself a mind-independent matter (2008d: 122). To what is ‘this fact’ supposed to be referring? The most natural reading is that it refers to the fact expressed in the first half of the sentence. Consider realism about penguins, for example. The proposition that there are penguins is true, and grounded by the penguins that exist in the world. The realist thinks that penguins exist mind-independently, which is plausible enough. Is the fact that penguins exist mind-independently itself a mind-independent fact? Presumably. In general, it seems that if the proposition  $\langle Xs \text{ exist mind-independently} \rangle$  is a fact, then that fact is itself a mind-independent matter. In other words, if the existence of something is a mind-independent matter, then it is also a mind-independent matter that the proposition that that thing exists is true. On this reading, the parenthetical addition adds no content to the account.

What Cameron seems to intend is that ‘this fact’ refers to something else. Suppose G provides the grounds for some proposition  $\langle p \rangle$ . Condition (iii) holds that realism about  $\langle p \rangle$  requires G to exist mind-independently. What Cameron also intends to require via the parenthetical is that a separate fact, *the fact that G grounds  $\langle p \rangle$* , is itself mind-independent. He writes: “You don’t count as a realist about  $\langle p \rangle$  if you think that some feature of the world grounds  $\langle p \rangle$  but are an anti-realist about the fact that it grounds  $\langle p \rangle$ ” (2008d: 122). In other words, not only must the grounds themselves exist mind-independently, so too must the grounding relation that obtains between the grounds and the truth. The possibility being brought up here is that while the existence of a particular kind of object may be a mind-independent matter, the issue of which things it makes true (or false) is not. Cameron does

not elaborate on the possibility of grounding relations being a mind-dependent matter, but it is worth dwelling upon because no one in the truthmaking literature has considered such a possibility, and it opens the door to understanding a powerful form of anti-realism from within a truthmaking context.

When some object  $T$  is a truthmaker for some proposition  $p$ , what accounts for the fact that  $T$  and  $p$  stand in the truthmaking relationship? Armstrong's view of the matter, as we have seen, is that the truthmaking relation is an *internal* relation, by which he means that the existence of the relata guarantee that the relation obtains (2004: 9). Socrates is a truthmaker for  $\langle$ Socrates exists $\rangle$ . The man and the proposition suffice for accounting why they stand in the truthmaking relation. What is not needed, according to Armstrong, is a further relational universal to fuse the two together. If Socrates and the proposition do not need any outside help for them to stand together inside the truthmaking relation, then it must be their very natures that accounts for why they do. Indeed, E. J. Lowe accounts for the truthmaking relation by holding that  $\langle$ Socrates exists $\rangle$  is made true by Socrates because it is a part of the former's essence to be true, provided that Socrates exists (2007: 250). Truthmaker theory in general relies upon the *de re* modal features of objects in accounting for which things stand in the truthmaking relation to which propositions (see Fox 1987: 189 and Merricks 2007: 11-14). Socrates is a truthmaker not just for  $\langle$ Socrates exists $\rangle$ , but for  $\langle$ There is a human $\rangle$  as well. Socrates makes true the latter proposition because Socrates is *essentially* human.

If we account for the truthmaking relation by relying on the *de re* modal features of objects and propositions, and hold that the modal profile of objects and propositions is a

mind-independent matter,<sup>57</sup> then we have the kind of truthmaking that is conducive for realism, and which Cameron appears to be attempting to capture in the parenthetical clause in 3. But most truthmaker theorists would be startled by the thought that there could be any *other* sort of truthmaking. Just what would a mind-dependent account of the truthmaking relation look like?

#### 4.3.3. Projectivist truthmaking

To get a sense for this new possibility for truthmaking, I suggest we look to the projectivist philosophy of Simon Blackburn (1984b, 1998).<sup>58</sup> When it comes to ethics, Blackburn is a projectivist. He doesn't think that the moral features of the world are "out there" waiting to be detected. Rather, we "gild and stain" the natural world with ethical features. But Blackburn is no mere subjectivist. In fact, his program of *quasi-realism* is intended to capture the objectivist trappings of realism without admitting its metaphysics. Quasi-realism, predictably, is a headache for any theorist trying to make sense of realism. The quasi-realist seeks to be able to say everything the realist says, and yet distinguish himself from the realist. Finding an account of realism and anti-realism that correctly categorizes quasi-realism as an anti-realist view is tricky business.

What is revealing about Blackburn's projectivism is how he repeatedly employs the language familiar to those interested in truthmaker theory. For instance, he writes:

It is because of our responses that we *say* that cruelty is wrong, but it is not because of them that it is so. [...O]ur actual responses are inappropriate for the wrongness of cruelty to depend upon. What makes cruelty abhorrent is not that it offends us, but all those hideous things that make it do so. (1988: 367)

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<sup>57</sup>But see Sidelle 1989 for criticism of this view.

<sup>58</sup>We'll tackle quasi-realism again in detail in section 5.2.7.

Interestingly, in a reprint of this article, Blackburn's talk of *dependence* here is swapped for talk of *anchoring*: "[O]ur actual responses are inappropriate anchors for the wrongness of cruelty" (1993b: 172). Elsewhere, Blackburn writes that "what makes it wrong to kick dogs is that it causes them pain" (1981: 179). Of course, what makes it wrong to kick dogs is exactly the same thing as what makes <It is wrong to kick dogs> true. Finally, Blackburn even employs the language of *being in virtue of* and of *grounds*:

Ethical avowals, like decisions and verdicts, require grounds. If I grade one paper higher than another, I must be prepared to indicate some relevant difference between them. We acknowledge the need to point to something that grounds our judgement, in virtue of which one is better than the other. But [...] no complete theory of ethics can simply point to the grounding properties, and suppose that evaluations are given their meaning by their relationship to them. We need first to understand the evaluative stance. (1998: 69)

That Blackburn is drawn to the same language exploited by truthmaker theorists is no coincidence. He, too, thinks that ethical truths (which he believes in, given his quasi-realism) are not brute facts: they are true in virtue of something that provides grounds for them. The grounds Blackburn cites are all naturalistic in nature: facts about pain, the detrimental consequences of cruelty, students' markings on exams. Because such naturalistic facts exist, certain moral judgments are true.

Now, Blackburn would loathe the suggestion that we can understand the truth of moral judgments by attending to the *de re* modal properties of the natural features and properties of the world. Indeed, he goes on to say that "no complete theory of ethics can simply point to the grounding properties, and suppose that evaluations are given their meaning by their relationship to them. We need first to understand the evaluative stance" (1998: 69). Blackburn is here critiquing "Cornell realism", the school of moral realist thought that treats moral facts as being identical with or reducible down to natural facts (e.g., Railton

1986 and Boyd 1988). In fact, he writes that “Cornell realism thinks we can identify the ‘truth-makers’ for our ethical thoughts, identifying what properties of things make them true, rather as the scientist identifies the property of stuff that identifies water or gold” (1998: 87-88). Blackburn’s criticism is that Cornell realism cannot simply engage in its naturalistic analysis of moral judgments, and claim to have offered a full account of the nature of moral thought. Such a metaethical view would miss the role of projection that Blackburn takes to be central to ethical thinking.

Regardless of whether this critique is sound, we can now notice a very interesting possibility. Blackburn and the naturalistic realist need not in principle have any dispute about which natural facts and properties provide the right kind of grounds for ethical judgments. When it comes to the wrongness of kicking dogs, they may well both point to the set of natural facts about what causes animals to feel pain. Both can say that what makes it true that kicking dogs is wrong is whatever makes it true that kicking dogs causes them pain. Both can, in principle, agree on what the truthmakers are for moral judgments. Yet we need not infer that they fall on the same side of the realism/anti-realism divide, even if they agree on what the truthmakers are for moral judgments. There is still room for disagreement: they can disagree as to *how things get to be truthmakers*.

Recall from above that most truthmaker theorists think that what determine the truthmaking relation—what it is that accounts for which objects make which propositions true—are the *de re* modal properties of those objects and propositions. Because Socrates is essentially human, he is a truthmaker for <There are humans>. When it comes to the relationship between moral truths and their naturalistic truthmakers, the naturalistic moral realists see a similar relationship. Given that moral facts and properties *just are* (or are

reducible to) natural facts and properties, it makes perfect sense why moral truths should, by necessity, accompany the existence of the relevant natural facts and properties. But here Blackburn would get off the boat. It is not a part of the *nature* or *essence* of the natural world that certain moral propositions be true. Such thinking misses the projected nature of moral properties. The natural world grounds the truths of morality, for Blackburn as well as for the naturalistic realist. What they disagree about is how to account for the grounding relationship that obtains between moral truths and the natural world. For the naturalistic realist, the relationship is understood in the way already familiar to truthmaker theory. It is part of the essence of certain natural facts that certain moral judgments will be true if those natural facts exist, just as it is part of the essence of collections of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules that certain judgments about water will be true if those collections of molecules exist. For Blackburn's projectivist, the relationship between moral truths and the natural facts that ground them must be understood another way.

My suggestion is that Blackburn is best understood as employing a kind of projectivist account of truthmaking. We as moral agents stumble our way through the natural world, and eventually begin evaluating it; as part of that evaluative stance, we project ethical features onto the world, for they are not "antecedently there". But we engage in this practice systematically—it is no part of ethical thinking to be arbitrary. We are not allowed to assign different grades, for example, to identical exams. Our gilding and staining must respect the restraint of non-arbitrariness; anyone who does otherwise "is convicted of misidentifying a caprice as a moral opinion" (Blackburn 1971: 115). It is this process of projection, the gilding and staining of the world in moral terms, that we need to turn to if we are to understand how the natural world ends up making true the claims of ethics. Suppose that

whenever we encounter some set of natural facts  $N$  we make a moral judgment  $p$ . We hold that  $p$  is true in virtue of  $N$ . The relationship is not to be understood in terms of any sort of metaphysical necessity holding between  $N$  and the truth of  $p$ . Still,  $N$  is playing a kind of truthmaking role toward  $p$ .  $N$  is a truthmaker for  $p$  because of our practices of projection, not because of their *de re* modal features.

What is the nature of projectivist truthmaking? That's a difficult question, and I do not have a fully developed answer. It's easier to say something negative rather than positive. Projectivist truthmaking, if it exists, does not rely on the *de re* modal features of objects. Accordingly, it probably does not involve the sort of ontological dependence that I take to be crucial to truthmaking as I defended it in the form of **TM**. One avenue worth exploring is whether the projectivist relationship here is at all related to another relation I have already invoked: the relation between the truth of analyticities and their constituent concepts. In section 1.2.5 I suggested that analyticities may be true *in virtue of* their constituent concepts while failing to be *made true* by them, for I was understanding making true as involving a kind of ontological dependence irrelevant to the truth of analytic statements. There may be instructive parallels between the two cases. I offer up the thought as one to be pursued in future work.

Regardless of the tenability of this sort of projectivist truthmaking, and its particular application in the moral domain, it seems clear that Blackburn is thinking in terms similar to what I have been describing. He thinks that ethical judgments require grounds for their truth, and those grounds, in virtue of which ethical judgments are true, are to be found in the natural world. Notice that the natural facts and properties to which Blackburn may appeal are themselves mind-independent entities. So far, then, the quasi-realist satisfies the first two and

a half requirements of Cameron's account of realism. Quasi-realists believe, unlike their emotivist predecessors, that ethical judgments are truth-apt, and, moreover, that many of them are literally and non-vacuously true. Quasi-realists can even hold that moral truths are grounded in the mind-independent natural world. Quasi-realists fail to collapse into realism, however, if we interpret the last requirement of Cameron's account in the second way I have offered. Even if  $p$  is made true by some mind-independent entity  $N$ , realism also requires that the truthmaking relation that obtains between  $p$  and  $N$  is itself a mind-independent matter. For the projectivist, the truthmaking relation that holds between moral truths and the natural world is a matter of projection, which involves a kind of mental labor on our part. Projectivist truthmaking, unlike the more familiar kind of truthmaking involving *de re* modal properties, is a mind-dependent kind of truthmaking. Accordingly, Cameron's **R**<sub>3</sub> can distinguish between realism and quasi-realism—at least provided that it is clarified and interpreted in the way that I have suggested. They can both agree that there are mind-independent entities responsible for the literal, non-vacuous truth of moral propositions. Where they disagree is in the account of how those entities end up being moral truthmakers.

#### 4.3.4. Truthmaking and realism: a new account

Given my interpretation of how we should understand Blackburn's quasi-realism, Cameron's account of realism manifests the impressive virtue of not only classifying quasi-realism as a form of anti-realism, but also pinpointing exactly where the anti-realism is to be found in the view. Quasi-realism is by design a deceptive view; it mimics realism in any way possible, such that it inevitably tends to obfuscate its distinctness from realism. My account of quasi-realism allows it all sorts of realist claims—including even the idea that moral truths

are true in virtue of a mind-independent reality—and yet avoids having to collapse it back into realism by means of its truly distinctive feature that it manifestly does not share with realism, namely, its projectivism.

I take the ability of Cameron's account to handle quasi-realism appropriately to be a very strong argument in favor of it. As it stands,  $\mathbf{R}_3$  correctly categorizes a number of anti-realist positions. Classical emotivism fails (i); subjectivism, relativism, constructivism, and idealism all fail the first half of (iii), while quasi-realism fails its second half. Still, there are other forms of anti-realism that  $\mathbf{3}$  cannot obviously countenance, at least not without some crucial reformulation, and it is those that will lead us to our final statement of realism.

Consider first error theories (e.g., Mackie 1977 and Field 1980). Formulating error theory is a tricky matter. It can't simply be the view that all the claims of a domain are false. If some proposition is a member of some domain, then so too is its negation, and they can't both be false. Further, error theorists are committed to many of the same truths as realists. For example, <All prime numbers greater than 2 are odd> is true, even for error theorists. According to the anti-realist, the proposition is a universal generalization with an empty antecedent, and so the proposition is true. Cameron would say that the proposition, for the error theorist, is *vacuously* true, and so fails condition (ii). But claims of vacuous truth have to be treated with great care when we approach them via truthmaker theory. The mathematical error theorist denies that there are any numbers; as a result, any mathematical claim existentially committed to numbers is false. But plenty of mathematical claims—all the negative existentials and universal generalizations—are not existentially committing, and so wind up true for error theorists. It doesn't immediately follow that their truth is vacuous. For suppose that our error theorist is, for independent reasons, a maximalist. There is no internal

tension between error theory and maximalism. Error theories are driven by suspicion about certain kind of entities (numbers or values, say), not by suspicion about whether all truths need truthmakers.

Assuming maximalism, both the realist and error theorist must provide a truthmaker for <All prime numbers greater than 2 are odd>. For the realist, the answer might go something like this:<sup>59</sup> The proposition is true in virtue of an infinitely large conjunctive state of affairs, including the state of affairs of 5's being a prime number greater than 2 and being odd, and 7's being a prime number greater than 2 and being odd, and so on, all taken together with the second-order state of affairs of all those numbers being *all* the prime numbers greater than 2. Because we are dealing with a universal generalization, its truthmaker has to involve something like a totality state of affairs that captures the "allness" that accompanies universal generalizations. The error theorist, too, needs to appeal to the totality fact; he needs a kind of object that rules out there being any numbers. Of course, the error theorist and realist will disagree as to what that totality fact is. They'll disagree as to which first-order states of affairs are a part of it, as the error theorist will think it doesn't include any states of affairs involving numbers. In essence, the realist needs to appeal to a totality fact that includes first-order states of affairs involving numbers, and the error theorists needs a totality fact that does not include any such states of affairs.

The upshot is that, once truthmaking is on the table, the very idea of vacuous truth is not so easy to understand. For the maximalist, *all* truths, existentially committing or not,

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<sup>59</sup>In what follows, I shall be employing, for ease of exposition, the machinery on which Armstrong relies. There are other options for handling truthmakers for negative and universal truths. See Cameron 2008a, for instance.

require truthmakers, and thereby require some metaphysical substance for them to be true.<sup>60</sup>

The maximalist error theorist believes in a large host of negative claims, and needs something like a totality fact to make them true. But totality facts are not good candidates for being mind-dependent objects. The matter of which states of affairs there are is not up to us. So it is not at all clear that  $\mathbf{R}_3$  has the resources for explaining why our maximalist error theorist is an anti-realist: he believes there to be truths in his anti-realist domain, and believes to it be a mind-independent matter that those truths are grounded by a mind-independent reality (i.e., a totality fact not involving numbers).

Another anti-realist view that  $\mathbf{R}_3$  doesn't obviously capture is Bas van Fraassen's constructive empiricism (1980). Van Fraassen is an anti-realist about unobservable entities because he is entirely agnostic regarding them. He thinks it is no responsibility of scientific theories to track the truth of the unobservable features of the world. That said, van Fraassen is happy to concede that *there are* facts of the matter about what the unobservable features of the world are. He just thinks that science does not provide us with evidence about what those facts are, and thus that agnosticism is the right cognitive attitude to hold toward them. Here, van Fraassen is happy to accept (i), and even to accept (iii). It is *because* the unobservable world is mind-independent—so independent, in fact, that our minds have no access to it—that he calls for agnosticism.

As for (ii), it too looks to be something that van Fraassen may accept as stated, though there may be an ambiguity here that needs sorting out. True, for any given proposition involving the unobservable, van Fraassen does not believe of it that it is true. But

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<sup>60</sup>We should not say—hearkening back to our discussion in section 4.2, that maximalists think that all truths are, it turns out, existentially or ontologically committing. <There is no god> is not existentially committing, even if it has a truthmaker, for it entails no existential truth. Our commitments come only after we take on a theory of truthmakers.

I see no reason for him to reject what (ii) actually says, which is that some propositions involving unobservables are true. Some of them are true; he just doesn't know which. For example, van Fraassen can happily concede that he knows that one of <There are electrons> and <There are no electrons> is true. Most fundamentally, constructive empiricism's anti-realism consists in its *not* taking on any sort of commitment to unobservable entities, just as the mathematical error theorists' anti-realism consists in their *not* taking on any sort of commitment to mathematical entities. What we are seeing is that  $\mathbf{R}_3$  is not the most perspicuous way of capturing these features.

The last anti-realist contender I want to consider is Jody Azzouni's nominalism in the philosophy of mathematics (2004, 2006). Like the error theorist, Azzouni accepts no mathematical ontology. However, Azzouni does not draw the inference that the existentially committing claims of mathematics are false. Propositions like <There are numbers> are true despite there not being any numbers. The view may appear contradictory at first, but it is in fact consistent because Azzouni, as we saw earlier, does not take quantificational expressions like 'there are' to be ontologically committing. Such commitments are best associated with something along the lines of an existence predicate. Hence, there is a difference between the propositions <There are numbers> and <There are numbers that EXIST>. According to Azzouni, the latter, which is a tenet of mathematical realism, is false. The former, however, can be true even if numbers do not really exist. In general, Azzouni holds that it is possible that "truth vehicles can be true without there being a metaphysical trace in the world that their truth reflects" (Azzouni 2006: 5).

As before, Azzouni appears to treat mathematical truths as non-discriminating propositions.<sup>61</sup> Recall also Sorensen's treatment of the truth-teller. He thinks that it has a definitive truth value, though we cannot know which one. Because Sorensen treats the truth-teller as a non-discriminating truthmaker gap, he must think that it in no way owes its truth to the way of the world. Hence, it could have had the opposite truth value, even if nothing else had been different about the world. Because nothing about reality can serve to account for the truth of the truth-teller, its truth value must be taken as an inexplicable, brute fact. Those who employ non-supervening truthmaker gaps look to be opening up the door to a new kind of anti-realism, for such truths are not in any way tied to reality. Had they been false, the world would not have noticed.

If we have another form of anti-realism on our hands here, it's not exactly clear how **R<sub>3</sub>** might find room for it. The posited truthmaker gaps are not obviously cases of "vacuous" truths. The paradigm case of a vacuous truth is a universal generalization with an empty antecedent, but that's not what we have here. A brute truth is not necessarily a vacuous one. Condition (iii) provides no guidance, as it just takes for granted that true sentences always have grounds. Since that presupposition is precisely what is being challenged, I cannot say how **R<sub>3</sub>** should come down on Azzouni and Sorensen. No mind-dependence is obviously involved, which is how **R<sub>3</sub>** in general approaches non-skeptical forms of anti-realism.<sup>62</sup>

Let me make one final complaint about **R<sub>3</sub>**. It holds that mind-independence is a necessary mark of realism. But it seems unlikely that mind-independence is *always* required

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<sup>61</sup>His account of mathematics is, of course, far more complicated than this. See his 1994, 2004, and 2006.

<sup>62</sup>A similar idea, which Azzouni floats elsewhere (Azzouni and Bueno 2008), is that some truths can be made true by fiat. Where there is no fact of the matter with respect to  $p$ , we are free to assign to it a truth-value of our choice. But here we have a perfectly adequate mind-dependent kind of truthmaking. It's not that  $p$  is made true by nothing; rather, it's made true by our decision that it be true. The idea we are presently considering is a non-supervening truthmaker gap, a truth tied in no way to the world. It's not that anyone decided that they're true. They just *are* true, and that's that. We can expect no more from a genuinely brute truth.

for realism. Mind-independence does not seem relevant to realism about mental states like beliefs, for instance. Its absence does seem indicative of anti-realism in metaethics, which is why many do not take subjectivism, relativism, and constructivism to be species of moral realism.<sup>63</sup> But if mind-independent truthmakers are not always called for, what kinds of truthmakers are? Well, the kinds of truthmakers that are indicative of realism may well depend on the domain. It is not my aim here to give a general account of what realism-relevant truthmakers are; I am somewhat skeptical that there is such an account. Paraphrasing Aristotle, we should not look for any more a precise account of realism and anti-realism than our subject permits (2000: 5; 1094b). My claim is merely that when we are inclined to judge a metaphysical view to be realist or anti-realist, that judgment is best understood and explained by attending to the kinds of truthmakers that the view provides. So what is the kind of ontology relevant for realism about some domain? To find out, we need only immerse ourselves in that domain of thought, and seek to uncover what it is that seems to be of such metaphysical significance as to generate the realism debate in the first place.

We can now appreciate what we need our truthmaking-based statement of realism to involve. We need to capture the successes of **R**<sub>3</sub>, but also take to heart some of the morals we have been drawing from our discussion of the various kinds of anti-realism. We need to show how one's realism involves what one is committed to, metaphysically speaking, and also make sense of truths that have no grounds. We also need to be sensitive to the distinction between the discriminating truthmaker gaps that are not indicative of anti-realism, and the

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<sup>63</sup>Another example: one might take response-dependence to be a mark of anti-realism in some domains, but not others. If ethical properties turn out to be response-dependent, some might draw the conclusion that moral realism is false. They might do this even if they take color properties to be response-dependent and yet not indicative of anti-realism about color. Like mind-dependence, whether response-dependence is a mark of anti-realism or not depends on the domain.

non-discriminating truthmaker gaps that are. Finally, we need to not rely simply on mind-independence when specifying the nature of realistic truthmakers and truthmaking.

First, we may note that condition (i) from  $\mathbf{R}_3$  is redundant, given (ii). If there are truths to be found in some domain, that must be because truth-aptness is also to be found in the domain. There is no truth without truth-aptness. So we may dispense with (i), for it does no work for us. It is intended to rule out classical non-cognitivists, but (ii) does that just as well. Something like condition (ii) is still important, for if there is any reality to a domain, then there must be truths about it. Realists must in turn commit to those truths. Condition (iii) remains necessary, though it needs to be broadened, and must be understood as above as relying on a mind-independent conception of truthmaking. All told, we end up with the following account of realism:

- ( $\mathbf{R}_4$ ) To be a realist with respect to a set of propositions is (i) to be committed to the truth of some particular propositions of the set, (ii) to be committed to a realism-relevant ontology of the relevant kind in virtue of which those truths are true, and (iii) to maintain that those truths are true in virtue of that ontology in a mind-independent fashion.

In effect,  $\mathbf{R}_4$  holds that realists are committed to the truths of the relevant domain, and take those truths to be made true by the right kind of ontology in a mind-independent way.  $\mathbf{R}_4$  is composed so as to avoid the various problems with  $\mathbf{R}_3$  that we have encountered.

Constructive empiricists fail the first condition, for they are not committed to the truth of any particular proposition about unobservables, though they are happy to say that many of them (they don't know which) are in fact true. Azzouni, or anyone else who relies on non-discriminating truthmaker gaps, fails to satisfy condition (ii), for they are not committed to any ontology at all grounding their anti-realist truths. Note that I speak of 'ontology' in general rather than truthmakers in particular in (ii) and (iii) so as to accommodate the

discriminating truthmaker gaps we have been countenancing. The earlier successes of  $\mathbf{R}_3$  carry over: non-cognitivists fail to satisfy (i), quasi-realists fail (iii), and the various brands of subjectivism constructivism, relativism, and idealism fail (ii).

In order to solve the aforementioned problem due to error theory, I have included ‘of the relevant kind’ in condition (ii). The problem, again, is that error theorists are committed to some truths in the domain where they detect massive error, and may, for independent reasons, be truthmaker maximalists. If so, error theorists will have realism-relevant grounds (such as totality facts) to serve as truthmakers for the relevant truths. Now, the ultimate thought we need to capture is easy enough to articulate. In the mathematics case, even where error theorists and realists agree on some proposition’s truth (in all likelihood a negative existential), they give different truthmakers for it. Realists need a totality state of affairs that includes numbers, whereas error theorists need a totality state of affairs without numbers. Speaking loosely, realists think such claims are true (in part) in virtue of the numbers that exist, while error theorists think they’re true (in part) in virtue of the *absence* of those numbers. It is tempting to fix the problem by amending condition (i) to require realists to believe in some *existentially committing* truths. In the mathematical domain, all the problematic cases are with negative existentials. But this fix won’t work in the ethical case, for ethical error theorists ought to believe in the truth of some existentially committing propositions, such as <It is not the case that Pol Pot was morally good>. Again, we know the insight we’re trying to capture: error theorists don’t believe in any truths made true in part by the kinds of entities or properties to which moral realists are committed. Mackie rejects the truth of any moral judgment that ascribes a moral property to an object because he thinks that the truth of such a judgment requires there to be an objective value, akin to a Platonic form of

goodness, in the world. What is common to both kinds of error theory is the idea that even if certain judgments in the defective domain turn out to be true, they are not true in the way that realists think they are. The details work themselves out differently in the two cases, and doubtless might work out yet another way in a different domain. Hence, I have stuck with my current formulation because it is open-ended enough to respect the diversity in the various domains of our thought, but not so vague that it fails to track the issue at hand. What is the kind of ontology relevant for realism about some domain? To find out, we need to jump headfirst into that domain and find out. Doing precisely that is the goal of the next chapters.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

As we continue our inquiry into realism and truthmaking, we shall proceed by turning to some specific realism debates directly, and showing how either the notion of truthmaking is already implicitly at work there, or how truthmaking can be put to work in sorting out the issues that divide realists from their opponents. Truthmaking has not yet been put to work explicitly in the realism debates we shall canvass.

Our goal, then, is to regiment as much of the extant realism literature as we can into a debate involving truthmakers. Doing so will enable us to uncover the distinctly metaphysical underpinnings to the various questions of realism. Where the question of realism has strayed from its metaphysical core (in the work of, say, Dummett), we will encounter more difficulty in applying the notion of truthmaking. That is to be expected. Inquiry into truthmaking is a metaphysical endeavor; semantic considerations are far from primary. Viewing realism through the lens of truthmaking enables us to keep a metaphysical focus on the topic of realism. Again, I stress that realism, whatever else it may be, is a distinctly metaphysical

doctrine, and we should understand it as such (cf. Arthur Fine 2001: 120). The epistemological, semantic, and pragmatic implications of realism can and ought to be explored. But in understanding what realism is, we should not lose sight of its metaphysical core. Realism is about reality, and reality falls under the purview of metaphysics.

Our investigation into the relationship between realism and truthmaking should not be misunderstood as simply a search for an adequate means for categorization. ‘Realism’ is a mere label, and labels are of no philosophical importance. Realism, by contrast, is of deep philosophical importance. The reason that the topic of realism is of such lasting interest to philosophers and those who think philosophically is that it seeks to reveal the ultimate nature of reality. To ask what we should be realists about is simply to ask what we should take to be real. Questions about reality are foundational to philosophy and metaphysics, and so long as people think philosophically they will engage with the topic of realism. But let us not forget that ‘realism’ has come to denote a plethora of views over the years. That diversity leads me to conclude that there is no single, privileged conception that states once and for all what realism *really* is. (Hence the built-in vagueness of **R<sub>4</sub>**.) I think that ‘realism’ is a label for a rich, broad family of views, attitudes, perspectives, and methodologies.

It is of little importance, at the end of the day, what classification we end up offering of which views we should count as realist, and which we should count as anti-realist. Such a classification will be of some utility, but will not solve any metaphysical puzzles. What is more important is bringing to the fore the metaphysical commitments and metaphysical differences that divide the various views that have been defended and critiqued in the realism literature. What we want to know, really, is why we draw a distinction between realism and anti-realism, and why we are compelled to place certain views on one side of the divide

rather than the other. Those differences and divides have become obscure as philosophers (some with intentions of dissolving rather than resolving realism disputes) have brought non-metaphysical considerations to bear on the question of realism. What we want at the end of a philosophical inquiry is a well-argued reason to prefer one conclusion over another; how we should classify that conclusion is of secondary interest.

Still, I do not mean to deny that ‘realism’ is a meaningful term, or that there is no utility in speaking of some views as being realist, and others as being anti-realist. Quite to the contrary. Rather, I simply want to stress that we should not forget that ‘realism’ is a slippery and fairly amorphous term. We should not fall into the trap of asking whether some view is realist or not, while at the same time presupposing that there is a determinate fact of the matter as to how to answer that question. The term is of our own making, and may not be all that sharp and precise in its meaning. What motivates realism in one domain may not motivate it in another. I simply am not convinced that ‘realism’ denotes a natural (or even philosophical) “kind”. Instead of asking whether some account is realist, we should uncover the metaphysical commitments that accompany that account and its competitors, and evaluate them on that basis. We can then understand why that view has traditionally been considered realist or not. Only after we have a good sense for the metaphysical terrain in a particular realism debate can we understand the metaphysical import of the divide.

It is needless to say, then, that I believe that there are substantive philosophical divides between realists and their opponents. But for as long as there is metaphysical debate, there will be those who judge such debate to rest on a mistake. It is no challenge to find so-called *quietists*, those who think that there are no genuine philosophical issues between realists and their opponents. Quietism, in various forms and to varying degrees, can be found

in the work of Wittgenstein (1953), Blackburn (1980, 2002b), Fine (1984a and 1984b), Rorty (1986), John McDowell (1994), Gideon Rosen (1994), Horwich (2006), and many others. Given that we aim to appeal to truthmaking in order to reveal genuine metaphysical questions and disputes that divide realists from their opponents, we shall have a rebuttal against those who seek to undermine the very topic of realism. The issue of realism and anti-realism is a genuine one, one foundational to all of philosophy and metaphysics. Those who follow us in endorsing the notion of truthmaking in order to help elucidate the nature of realism need not undergo any costly (and ultimately futile) philosophical therapy. Quietism, like psychoanalysis, has no place in a scientifically informed and philosophically respectable worldview.

#### 4.5. Appendix: realism about truth

Given our extended discussion of both truth and realism, it is natural to engage the topic of realism about truth. What is it to be a realist about truth? Ultimately, my view is that the question is not very important. We can introduce the realism/anti-realism distinction to the particular topic of truth, but doing so results in no more than a multiplication of labels, and not any philosophical illumination. My sense is that the idea of a realist conception of truth is an unfortunate remnant of the days of non-neutrality between truth and realism. For folks like Dummett, Putnam,<sup>64</sup> and Rorty, there is no distinguishing between “metaphysical realism” and “realism about truth”.<sup>65</sup> Once we realize that the two topics can be distinguished, and that one’s broader metaphysical views are not settled by one’s attitudes toward truth (and vice versa), then the interest in formulating a realist sense of truth evaporates. Still, let us

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<sup>64</sup>Or at least the “middle” Putnam of the late seventies and eighties.

<sup>65</sup>See Horwich 1982 for discussion.

briefly examine what now flies under the banner of realist truth. In so doing, we will also be able to clear up some misconceptions that exist in the literature, particularly toward deflationary theories of truth.

A first suggestion as to what realism about truth is, and a non-starter at that, is simply that there are truths. But since it is impossible to deny coherently that there are truths, such realism about truth is trivially satisfied. A second suggestion would be that realism about truth is simply another name for what we have called metaphysical substantivism about truth, the thesis that there is a property (in some metaphysically loaded sense) of truth, be it a universal, trope, or natural class. Metaphysical deflationists, then, would be anti-realists about truth.<sup>66</sup> Lynch would be happy with that conclusion. He defines realism about truth as the combination of metaphysical substantivism and the rejection of epistemic accounts of truth:

In short, realism about truth minimally implies two commitments: (a) truth is an authentic property that some propositions have and others lack, and (b) the concept of truth is, in Putnam's words, "radically non-epistemic"; that is, whether a proposition is true (in most cases) does not depend on what I or anyone else believes or knows. (1998: 101)

I am not sure what makes a property authentic (perhaps he means what we mean by a property being metaphysically robust or sparse), but I am sure that Lynch intends commitment (a) to disqualify deflationists from being realists about truth. So for Lynch, realism is a club to which neither (metaphysical) deflationists nor epistemicists are invited to join. Of course, we have already seen why no one should want to be a realist about truth in Lynch's sense. Metaphysical substantivism about truth is not a view anyone should wish to hold. We have rejected (a) outright, and so, I suppose, we are anti-realists about truth in

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<sup>66</sup>Devitt (2002a) adopts this understanding of realism about truth. (Or at least something close: realist views of truth hold that truth has a nature; anti-realist views hold, with deflationism, that truth has no nature.)

Lynch's eyes. For all that, we may still adopt a non-deflationary conception of truth (i.e., conceptual substantivism), a particular criterion of ontological commitment, and a thoroughgoing truthmaker theory to boot. We may wish to be realists about universals, states of affairs, or whatever else we require in order to make sense of our world. What, then, is lacking? Is there anything lost in abandoning Lynch's realism about truth? Take some particular truth: that electrons are charged. I might believe that 'Electrons are charged' has a truthmaker, and that this truthmaker is a state of affairs. I may believe that this truth is as objective as it gets—it would be true regardless of whether anyone had ever thought of it. All the foregoing is consistent with a thoroughgoing anti-realism about truth, in Lynch's sense, for I have not yet adopted the view that there is some metaphysically robust property of truth. If we accept Lynch's account of realism about truth, then the conclusion is clear. Realism about truth is false, and not anything that we should be sad to abandon (even if we are, like Bigelow, congenital realists about just about everything).

Fumerton has also advanced an account of realism about truth, but it is also lacking. At first he seems to endorse Lynch's position—realism about truth consists in there being a property of truth “in the most neutral sense possible”, and that truth is mind-independent, a condition which Fumerton then “more carefully” presents as the idea that *truthmakers* are mind-independent (2002: 4).<sup>67</sup> First, I certainly acknowledge that there is an entirely neutral sense in which truth is a property—that's the sense in which we can all agree that we can predicate truth of truth-bearers. 'True' is an adjective of our language (a satisfied one, even), and in that neutral sense there is a property of truth. Why Fumerton thinks that *that* sense of a property is philosophically relevant to realism about truth escapes me. As for the mind-

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<sup>67</sup>Later, Fumerton defines the realist about truth as one who “thinks that the predicate expression “is true” picks out a genuine property” (2010: 91).

independence criterion, Fumerton presumably is trying to capture something like Lynch's non-epistemic criterion. Things are true independently of anything we may have to say about them. His jump to truthmakers, however, simply betrays an unwarranted conflation of truth and truthmaking. After some refinement, Fumerton presents his view as follows:

we can characterize the realist as holding that every truth is made true by some fact (some feature of the world) that is conceptually independent of any representation of it (conceptually independent of any intentional state with that fact as its object). (2002: 9)

Realism about truth now seems to be committed both to truthmaker maximalism and to a controversial view as to what truthmakers there are. Since we have seen reasons to reject maximalism, we yet again have reason to be anti-realists about truth, in Fumerton's sense. And again, this is no great loss. Besides, Fumerton's account of realism about truth reveals that he seems to be interested more in developing an account of truthmakers than truth. We have gone to great lengths to keep those two tasks separate; the theory of truth and the theory of truthmakers are very distinct enterprises.

Perhaps the most important contemporary figure when it comes to realist truth is William Alston (see his aptly titled 1996 and 2001). Interestingly, Alston finds there to be nothing more to realism about truth than acceptance of the T-sentences: "Anyone who realizes the necessary, conceptual, analytic truth of any substitution instance of the T-schema has grasped the realist conception of truth" (2001: 47). On the realist picture, truths tell it like it is: "A statement, for example, is true if and only if (iff) what the statement is about is as the statement says it to be" (Alston 2001: 41). For Alston, then, realism about truth amounts to no more than the generalized propositional truth schema:

(T<sub>2</sub>) The proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*.

Alston has no worries about substitutional quantification, and so endorses  $T_2$  as a universally substitutionally quantified sentence, and thinks that it expresses realism about truth (Newman 2002 seems to agree). Merricks defines realism about truth similarly, though he foregoes the general formulation  $T_2$  and simply endorses the series of biconditionals it produces (2007: 175).<sup>68</sup> It is clear that Alston's realism about truth takes as its main target epistemic and verificationist theories of truth.<sup>69</sup> Those theories are the notorious ones most responsible for running together the theories of truth and realism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Alston is not himself guilty of any such non-neutrality, but his framing of the issue clearly reveals how steeped it is in the non-neutralist tradition.

Defining realism about truth in a way that relies solely on the truth schema risks trivializing the notion. Merricks is happy about the consequence; he does not think that realism about truth is controversial. Given that Tarski (1956) thought it a condition of adequacy on any theory of truth that it must entail the T-sentences (let us set aside the subtleties as to whether theories must entail the sentential versions, propositional versions, both, or whatever), it would follow that any adequate theory of truth must be realist. Furthermore, it might be thought that *every* theory of truth worth its salt upholds the T-sentences, and so would count as realist. If so, then realism about truth is all well and good, but does not serve to divide the philosophical landscape in any way. "Realism" about truth now seems to amount to no more than a theory of truth that is minimally adequate. Again, I suggest we not multiply labels beyond necessity.

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<sup>68</sup>It's worth reminding ourselves here of how many theorists see the correspondence theory of truth right inside the set of T-sentences: the right-hand side is taken to refer to a fact corresponding to the truth-bearer mentioned on the left-hand side. See again the discussion in section 3.4.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. the way Davidson handles realism about truth (1990: 304-305). He regrets having applied the language of realism to the language about truth, noting that he merely sought to distinguish his own view from epistemic accounts of truth.

However, it is often thought that some theories of truth have difficulty accounting for the T-sentences. Ramsey, at times, suggests that only correspondence theorists can maintain T-sentences (1991: 18). Merricks thinks that deflationists (!) stumble on the T-sentences (2007: 191), while Horwich thinks that non-deflationary theories of truth face difficulties accounting for the T-sentences (1996: 193). Alston (1996, chapter 7) argues against epistemic theories by showing how they cannot embrace the T-schema.<sup>70</sup> If some theories of truth are in fact incompatible with the T-sentences, then so much the worse for those theories. But that is just to say that Tarski's adequacy condition is a genuine adequacy condition. The detour through whether a theory is realist or not is beside the point. The problem with a theory of truth that denies certain T-sentences is not that those theories aren't realist, and realism is true. It's that those theories deny certain T-sentences, even though those T-sentences are true.<sup>71</sup>

If realism about truth is just due respect for the truth schemas, then discussion over realism about truth is no more than the needless proliferation of labels. If one chooses to call some thesis "realism about truth", so be it. I shall not dispute about a word. My point is only that talking about realism about truth is potentially misleading, hearkens back to a past age that falsely presupposed non-neutrality, and doesn't lead to any philosophical illumination. We have seen that on some readings, realism about truth is simply false, and that our rejection of it is of nothing valuable. On other readings, realism is true, and possibly upheld by everyone who is a party to the debate over truth. But there is an interesting question whether certain theories of truth fail to respect properly the T-sentences. As I have suggested,

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<sup>70</sup>Similarly, Young thinks coherence theorists can happily reject certain interpretations of T-sentences (2009: 573).

<sup>71</sup>Or, perhaps, the problem with some theories is that they assign the T-sentences the incorrect modal status.

it is misleading to frame that question as one about whether those theories are realist or anti-realist about truth. The question is important primarily because it is relevant to whether the theories of truth in question are true.

There are reasons to think that coherence, pragmatist, verificationist, and epistemic accounts of truth (i.e., those accounts most often associated with anti-realism) do not respect the T-sentences. A simple recipe shows how to bring out the tension. Take the proposition that there are penguins. The proposition that there are penguins is true just in case there are penguins. Hence we have:

(8) <There are penguins> is true if and only if there are penguins.

I contend that **8** is not only true, but necessarily so. It is impossible for the proposition to be true, and yet there be no penguins, or for there to be penguins, and yet the proposition not be true. But now consider how the theories of truth cited above handle <There are penguins>:

(9) <There are penguins> is true if and only if <There are penguins> coheres in the best system of beliefs.

(10) <There are penguins> is true if and only if <There are penguins> is useful to believe.

(11) <There are penguins> is true if and only if <There are penguins> is verifiable.

(12) <There are penguins> is true if and only if <There are penguins> would be justified in ideal epistemic conditions.

Now we just engage in some modal speculation. Is it possible to imagine, for instance, that although the proposition that there are penguins is true, that there are no penguins? No.

Hence, **8** is necessarily true. But suppose we are coherentists, and believe **9**. Is it possible to imagine a case where the proposition that there are penguins coheres in a best system of beliefs, and yet there are no penguins? Yes. But this is a case where the proposition is true, and yet there are no penguins. So **9** implies the possible falsity of **8**, and so **9** is false. We can

proceed similarly for the others. Might it be useful to believe that there are penguins, even though there are none? Yes. So much for **10**. We can refute the others working backwards. Suppose (for whatever reason) that the proposition that there are penguins is not verifiable. According to **11**, then, the proposition is not true. Might there still be penguins? Of course. (Perhaps they reside outside humanity's past and future light cones.) So **11**, too, implies the possible falsity of **8**. Similarly, suppose that ideal epistemic conditions reveal <There are penguins> not to be justified. Might there still be penguins? Of course.<sup>72</sup> So much for **12**.<sup>73</sup>

Call these lines of argument "fast-track" refutations of the various theories of truth. They have been around for a long time, and proponents of the respective views are well aware of them.<sup>74</sup> I do not mean to suggest that there are no responses available to them (or that they cannot disagree with the answers I have given to my own questions above). At the end of the day, though, I suspect that the arguments are sound. It has long been my suspicion that the initial and most natural objections that arise to philosophical theories are also the most devastating. Theories evolve and take on epicycle after epicycle in order to avoid such objections, but ultimately never escape from them.

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<sup>72</sup>If one disagrees, that is most likely due to one's holding an understanding of "ideal epistemic conditions" that already presupposes a non-epistemic conception of truth. Indeed, there is no understanding what an "ideal" theory is such that it could come apart from being a true theory. Truth just is a necessary condition for a theory to be ideal, and philosophers are fooling themselves if they think they have some other notion in mind. So much the worse for Putnam's argument against realism (1978).

<sup>73</sup>Similarly, one can take the argument of section 3.3.2 to be that if one takes the proposition's "corresponding with the facts" to be something separate from the existence of penguins, then we end up with the same inconsistency. The correspondence theorist must hold that the correspondence can obtain only when penguins exist, and that is to posit unprincipled necessary connections between distinct existences. Or, if the correspondence amounts to no more than the existence of penguins, we fall back into anodyne truthmaker theory. So much for correspondence. That there is a parallel between my new argument against correspondence theories and these familiar refutations of the other substantive views is rather interesting and surprising, for it shows that defenders of correspondence theories fall prey to their own arguments.

<sup>74</sup>See, for instance, Stout 1907 and Russell 1908, both of which take on pragmatic theories of truth in a similar vein, and Russell 1906-1907 and Van Cleve 1996, which take on coherence theories.

The basic problem with these theories of truth is that the truth of a proposition is identified with something beyond the original content of the proposition. What is it for <There are penguins> to be true? For there to be penguins. Not for belief in them to be useful, cohere in some story, or be justified at the end of scientific inquiry, whatever that is. No, what it is for <There are penguins> to be true is for there to be penguins. Here, I adopt the Butlerian maxim that everything is what it is, and not another thing (2006: 44). The truth of <Snow is white> just is snow's being white, and nothing else. The truth of <Grass is green> is grass's being green, and nothing else. Deflationists have long acknowledged the insight here; truthmaker theorists should as well.

Let us return to our original topic: realism about truth. If it can be shown that certain theories of truth must reject the truth or even just the necessity of certain T-sentences (in particular, the propositional ones), then I conclude that those theories are false. Others might say that they are anti-realist (and then perhaps reject the theories as false because realism about truth is true).<sup>75</sup> Again, I do not see any value in describing the issue as yet another realism debate. There are plenty of realism debates to get immersed in. I suggest that we do not add the theory of truth as yet another one.

That said, I think it is fairly clear why some talk about realism about truth, and why many go out of their way to defend it. In an earlier section, I defended the so-called “worldliness” of truth, the idea that truths have ontological and metaphysical commitments. Correspondence theories of truth grant the worldliness of truth, as does truthmaker theory. In fact, I suggested that we reject correspondence theories in part because truthmaker theory

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<sup>75</sup>Arriving at more or less the same point from a different direction, Colin McGinn argues that coherence and pragmatist theories of truth can maintain the T-sentences, but only at the cost of immediately embracing some sort of idealism (2000: 88-90; see also his 2002: 195). The reason why is that they would agree, as Young puts it in a separate but related discussion: “A T-sentence is supposed to say what makes a given sentence true” (2009: 573).

itself gives us all the worldliness we need. Furthermore, what seems fundamentally wrong with coherence, pragmatic, and epistemic theories is that they leave out the world in their accounts of truth. The truth of the matter may very well be that what others have called “realism” about truth, I have called its “worldliness”. So truthmaker theory is out to uphold exactly what defenders of realist truth have been out to uphold. My suggestion all along is that such matters are better handled by the metaphysical theory of truthmaking, and *not* the theory of truth itself.

## 5. Truthmaking, Metaethics, and Creeping Minimalism

In the previous chapter, we saw reasons to think that the debates between realists and their opponents are better thought of as debates about truthmakers, not debates about truth. The issue over how we should understand the reality of a domain of thought is better understood when viewed through the lens of the theory of truthmaking, which is perfectly suited to give an account of what the reality is that underlies some domain of our thought. That said, truthmaker theory offers no easy recipe for understanding what the topic of realism is all about in a given domain. But we do have two thoughts that can guide our explorations. First, what is at stake between realists and anti-realists is not *whether* the truths of some domain have truthmakers, but rather the *nature* of the truthmakers that operate in that domain, and the nature of how they got to be truthmakers. Second, even within the class of truthmaker gaps, we have seen an important distinction between gaps that are metaphysically discriminatory and those that are not. Non-discriminating truthmaker gaps are true independently of how the world is—of reality—and thus seem perfectly suited to give insight into the nature of perhaps some varieties of anti-realism.

The best way to argue for a truthmaking approach to realism is to jump headfirst into the various realism debates and try to understand them in terms of how they approach the topic of truthmakers. In this chapter, we shall explore one of the best mapped out realism debates in all of philosophy, the one in metaethics.

### 5.1. A new approach to metaethics

To adopt, as I suggest, the truthmaker approach to realism is to engage in something akin to a shift in paradigm. Painting with a very wide brush, we can say that the old metaethical paradigm focused on moral *truth*. Our approach centers on moral *truthmakers*. The old paradigm is perhaps best encapsulated by a formulation of realism by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord: “Wherever it is found, I’ll argue, realism involves embracing just two theses: (1) the claims in question, when literally construed, are literally true or false (cognitivism), and (2) some are literally true” (1986: 3). Sayre-McCord’s account gives moral anti-realists two options. They can, like the classical emotivists, resist the view that moral statements have truth-values (e.g., Stevenson 1944 and 1963, Ayer 1952, and Hare 1952). Or they can deny that moral statements are literally true, either because they are literally false (e.g., Mackie 1977), or because their truth is not literal (e.g., Harman 1975 and Wong 1984 and 2006). Regardless of the method, the moral anti-realist is one who must avoid moral truth. Moral truths are the mark of moral realism.<sup>1</sup>

According to the new paradigm of metaethics, moral truth is no longer the enemy of moral anti-realism. Nowadays, it is pervasively claimed that moral truth and moral anti-realism can go hand in hand.<sup>2</sup> Consider, to name a first example, the quasi-realist camp (e.g., Blackburn 1984b and 1998 and Gibbard 1990 and 2003). The quasi-realist seeks to claim the truth of nearly everything that the moral realist believes. For all that, the quasi-realist claims not to be committed to realism.<sup>3</sup> Or consider Wright’s approach to moral realism (1992, 1995). For Wright, the hallmark of moral realism is not moral truth (for that, he thinks, is

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<sup>1</sup>James Dreier calls the old paradigm the “Good Old Days” of metaethics (2004: 23).

<sup>2</sup>In Kit Fine’s terminology, such views are “non-skeptical” forms of anti-realism (2001). Cf. his 1982: 72.

<sup>3</sup>See also the “cognitivist expressivism” of Timmons 1999 and Horgan and Timmons 2000 and 2006a.

attained quite cheaply), but something else, such as the depth of explanatory power assigned to moral facts (to name just one of his “cruces”).<sup>4</sup>

Now, it is sometimes claimed that what entitles the moral anti-realist to embrace moral truth is his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and subsequent acceptance of some kind of deflationary theory.<sup>5</sup> If there is any take-home point in what I have written so far, it is that such a move is fraught with misunderstanding. To stake out a deflationary view of truth is not in any way to take on a realism-relevant metaphysical stand. Deflationism is consistent with the most robust realism imaginable. The trick to fusing moral anti-realism and moral truth is not the deflationary theory of truth (though the latter may help in enabling the union), but rather adopting a certain view of metaphysical commitment, a view about what it is to which those truths are committed.

When it comes to articulating what it is about moral realism that makes it a form of realism, the truthmaker theorist has a ready answer. Realists have a particular view as to what moral reality is. They may agree with the moral anti-realist as to much of what is true in the ethical domain. But they have distinctive views about what *makes* those truths true. They think that the anti-realists’ suggested truthmakers are too meager and weak to respect and account for the proper level of objectivity relevant to moral discourse. The moral anti-realist gives a different account as to what makes true the moral statements he believes to be true.

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<sup>4</sup>Consider this passage from Wright: “To grant that notions of truth and falsity, and thereby belief and disbelief, can engage with moral contents is no concession to moral realism at all; the question is what the notion of truth *comes to* in the moral case—and whether, in particular, it can carry the significance which moral realism requires” (1988: 8). See also his 1995: “what we want, of course, is a way of casting the anti-realist intuition which is consistent with the integrity of moral discourse and argument, and which allows us to take a moral point of view with a clean intellectual conscience” (213). Cf. Blackburn 1984b: 196.

<sup>5</sup>This claim seems to be implicit in much of the work of Blackburn and Wright. Russ Shafer-Landau seems to attribute the view to contemporary expressivists (2003: 31). Michael Smith (1994c) may well endorse it. Dreier (2004), Andy Egan (2007), and Matthew Chrisman (2008 and 2009) present deflationism as a key ingredient in the anti-realist claim to moral truth. See Dreier 1996 for discussion.

He thinks the moral realist either overestimates the objectivity belonging to moral thought, or does not appreciate how the anti-realist's favored account of moral truthmakers is sufficient to ground the truth of moral claims. In any case, the truthmaker approach to realism emphasizes that the realism debate is one with fundamentally metaphysical implications. It is a *realism* debate after all. While the topic of truthmaking has not consciously been brought to bear on the metaethical dispute between realists and anti-realists, I suspect that issues involving truthmaking have long been operating just under the surface.<sup>6</sup> My hope is that by attending to the debate and, in effect, regimenting it into a debate about truthmakers, we can find some metaethical clarity, and pave a road to progress.

My claim is that the topic of what makes moral truths true has been simmering just under the surface of metaethical debate. To make good on that claim, I suggest we take a tour through the various prominent metaethical views in order to see just how easily they could incorporate the notion of moral truthmaking. Having surveyed how the various positions understand what it is that makes moral truths true, we can appreciate what is at stake in the metaethical debate, at least in its metaphysical aspects. Moral realism and moral anti-realism are views best formulated with an eye toward truthmaker theory.

The truthmaker approach to moral realism has more to offer than just a way of categorizing metaethical views. For one, we can use considerations about truthmaking to put pressure on various metaethical views, and argue for and against particular theories. Also, we can put it to work in offering a solution to the problem that James Dreier has dubbed "creeping minimalism" (2004). Dreier's contention is that once we adopt deflationism about truth (which seems necessary if anti-realists are to embrace moral truth alongside realists),

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<sup>6</sup>The language of truthmaking does surface here and there, though in a way that is clearly disengaged from the "truthmaking industry" alive and well in contemporary metaphysics. See Blackburn 1986, Milo 1995, Bloomfield 2003: 513, Shafer-Landau 2003: 15 and 48, and Horgan and Timmons 2006b for some instances.

we are led down a path that threatens to cloud what seemed originally to be at stake between moral realists and anti-realists. By attending to how the different metaethical views address our truthmaking queries, we will see those differences reemerge. The problem of creeping minimalism is no problem at all for the truthmaker theorist's approach to metaethical debate.

## 5.2. Truthmakers for moral truths

### 5.2.1. Moral realism

I propose that we enter the metaethical terrain with the realists. Traditionally, moral realists are divided into two categories: naturalists and non-naturalists.<sup>7</sup> Naturalists take morality to be a perfectly real, perfectly natural phenomenon. Naturalistic moral realism often goes by the name 'Cornell realism', and is defended by Nicholas Sturgeon (1984), Peter Railton (1986), Richard Boyd (1988), David Brink (1989), Frank Jackson (1998)<sup>8</sup>, and Devitt (2002b) among others. Naturalistic realists take moral properties and facts and reduce them to or identify them with natural properties and facts.

Non-naturalistic realism finds its *locus classicus* in Moore 1903, and is defended today by Russ Shafer-Landau (2003). For non-naturalistic realists, moral properties cannot in any way be reduced to or identified with the non-moral. Moore famously launched the open question argument, which purports to show that any analysis of goodness in terms of some other property will "leave open" an important question: but is that really good? In particular, no natural property can be identified with any moral property. (To do so would be to commit the naturalistic fallacy.) Hence, Moore takes goodness to be a non-natural, indefinable

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<sup>7</sup>But see also the "Oxford realists" who, following out some insights of Wittgenstein, understand moral properties to be secondary properties (e.g., Wiggins 1976 and McDowell 1981 and 1985). Jonathan Dancy (1986) questions whether such views should count as being realist; I share the worry.

<sup>8</sup>But note that Jackson, while considering himself a naturalistic realist, distances himself from the Cornell school. See his 1998: 144-146.

property. Moore takes on a metaphysical commitment to an independent realm of moral reality, and it is that commitment that places him squarely in the realist camp.

Shafer-Landau defines moral realism in terms of independent moral truth:

The way I would prefer to characterize the realist position is by reference to its endorsement of the *stance-independence* of moral reality. Realists believe that there are moral truths that obtain independently of any preferred perspective, in the sense that *the moral standards that fix the moral facts are not made true by virtue of their ratification from within any given actual or hypothetical perspective*. That a person takes a particular attitude toward a putative moral standard is not what makes that standard correct. (2003: 15)

Similarly, Brink defines moral realism as the view that there are moral facts or truths whose truth is independent of the evidence for them (1989: 17).<sup>9</sup> Boyd endorses these characterizations, and adds the epistemological claim (which we shall set aside) that “ordinary canons of moral reasoning” can produce moral knowledge (1988: 182).<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, these characterizations of realism are not entirely satisfactory, for quasi-realists seem to be entitled to them.<sup>11</sup>

However the details unfold, realists will be able to answer our truthmaking queries by appealing to moral facts and properties (naturalistically construed or not). We shall see the best way for them to do this below. Somewhat surprisingly, though, Shafer-Landau at one point characterizes his realist view (and realism of other stripes as well) as one that eschews moral truthmakers. He writes:

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<sup>9</sup>Though Brink qualifies this thesis as necessary but probably insufficient for realism.

<sup>10</sup>Smith defines moral realism as “the view that, amongst the various facts there are in the world, there aren’t just facts about (say) the consequences of our actions or the well-being of our families and friends, there are also distinctively moral facts: facts about the rightness and wrongness of our actions having these consequences” (1994b: 9). I’m not sure what he means by ‘distinctively moral’. Is a kind of non-naturalism intended? Are the facts to be understood linguistically or metaphysically? Gibbard (1990) also associates realism with the existence of a distinctive kind of fact, though I raise the same questions for him. Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons also define moral realism in terms of facts (1992b). Blackburn associates realism with the “irreducible or essential appeal to the existence of moral ‘properties’ or ‘facts’” and the demand for an ontology of morals (1988: 370). This more ontological account is closest to what I shall be offering.

<sup>11</sup>See also Railton 1986: 164-165 for a helpful slew of realism-relevant questions and theses.

moral and other realists about irreducible domains are on a par when it comes to the extremely limited kind of explanation they can give of the status of their favoured standards. If some standard is true, irreducible, and to be construed realistically, then nothing *makes* it true; its truth is not a creation, but instead a brute fact about the way the world works. (2003: 48)

The straightforward reading of this passage is that Shafer-Landau thinks moral truths are what we have called non-discriminating truthmaker gaps. Their truth makes no difference to the world. Their truth is a mere brute fact, and is in no ways ontologically accountable. On this reading, Shafer-Landau would be best understood as an arch anti-realist: there are moral truths, but their truth is in no way tied to reality. I think the best way to interpret this striking passage, then, is that it betrays an understanding of truthmaking that is out of sync with the approach we have undertaken, and a conflation between the linguistic and metaphysical reading of facts.<sup>12</sup> Shafer-Landau is taking moral truths as being irreducible to other (say, naturalistic) truths. If they were reducible, then, he would say, it would be those naturalistic truths that made moral truths true. We can predict that Shafer-Landau would agree that though there are moral facts, they aren't made true by any natural facts (as Cornell realists would have it). So what Shafer-Landau should say is that there is a realm of moral facts (in the metaphysical sense), distinct from the naturalistic facts, and that moral judgments are true or false in virtue of the existence of those moral facts.

How, then, should the moral realist answer our question of what makes moral truths true? Here I think answers can and should diverge, since moral realists need not subscribe to any single metaphysic any more than any truthmaker theorist need be committed to a particular metaphysic. There are two traditional answers that realists have given that we may

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<sup>12</sup>Evidence for this reading is the fact that Shafer-Landau does not deny the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral. If the truth of some contingent moral proposition  $p$  is brute, then there is a metaphysically indiscernible world where  $p$  is false. Taking moral truths as brute thus violates the supervenience of truth on being, and *a fortiori* the supervenience of moral truth on non-moral being. We shall take up the topic of moral supervenience below.

now flesh out. One option is to say that what makes moral judgments true are moral facts. As before, we must be extremely careful about how we wield ‘fact’. One sense of the term—famously captured by Strawson 1950—is what I have been calling the *linguistic* conception. The linguistic conception of facts is governed by another one of the familiar and undeniable T-schemas, the fact schema:

(**T<sub>4</sub>**) It is a fact that *p* if and only if *p*.

If there are truths, then there are facts. No one need disagree about that.<sup>13</sup> But facts in this sense—nominalizations of true truth-bearers, in effect—are terrible truthmakers.<sup>14</sup> They exist in possible worlds where they are false, if they be contingent. If the (linguistic) fact that snow is white just is the true proposition <Snow is white>, then it exists in worlds where it is false (though we wouldn’t call it a fact in such worlds). In any event, speaking of facts in the liberal, linguistic sense in the same breath as speaking of facts as truthmakers will only breed confusion. The other sense—the *metaphysical* sense—is the idea of facts as compound or structured entities. Here we have a sense that will be suitable for truthmaking. Armstrong (1997) calls such things “states of affairs”, while Mellor (1995) calls such things “facta”. Russell (1985) just called them “facts”. Facts in the metaphysical sense are concrete, existing objects. For Armstrong, if some particular *a* instantiates the universal F, then ‘*a* is F’ is true, and made true by the state of affairs that is composed non-mereologically of *a* and F. In worlds where *a* does not instantiate F, the state of affairs of *a*’s being F does not exist.

One way to be a moral realist is to advocate a realm of moral facts, in the metaphysical sense. (Anyone who believes in moral truth will be committed to moral facts in

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<sup>13</sup>Do not be tempted into saying that *deflationists* can accept that there are moral facts because of **T<sub>4</sub>**. That is true, but violates the Gricean maxim on informativeness. *Anyone* can accept the existence of moral facts simply by accepting that there are moral truths because **T<sub>4</sub>** is available to all (who are competent speakers of English).

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Fine 1982: 72, and why facts in this sense cut no metaphysical ice between realists and anti-realists.

the linguistic sense.) Such moral facts will be composed of particulars and moral properties, here understood as universals. What makes the moral realist position distinctive is that it posits the existence of such properties. The non-naturalist thinks that these moral properties are not in any way identifiable with or reducible to other non-moral properties. They enjoy a *sui generis* existence. Such properties, taken together with the particulars that instantiate them in order to compose states of affairs, make for adequate truthmakers for moral judgments. In every possible world in which some object *a* instantiates the universal *goodness*, *a* will be good. Hence, the state of affairs (*a*, *goodness*) is a truthmaker for ‘*a* is good’.

Those who believe in moral facts, understood metaphysically as above, will also believe in moral properties in the form of universals (assuming that they understand facts along the general lines advocated by Armstrong). Sometimes moral realism is defined exclusively in terms of the existence of moral properties (e.g., Dancy 1986).<sup>15</sup> Even if one does not believe in moral facts, one can still use such properties to serve as a proper ontological ground for moral claims (so long as those properties are understood in one of the “metaphysically robust” ways we saw in section 3.2.4). If moral properties are tropes, then they will be able to serve as truthmakers for moral predications. Or, if we relax our truthmaking ambitions and think that predications do not require truthmakers (following Lewis 2001b), then we can still say that moral truths are metaphysically committing in that the possible worlds where the moral judgment ‘*a* is M’ is true differ in some metaphysical

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<sup>15</sup>Just as the term ‘fact’ has been abused in metaethics, so too has ‘property’. Recall from our chapter on deflationism that there is a completely innocuous sense to the word ‘property’. There is a property X just in case ‘X’ is a predicate of our language. So suppose that there is some true moral predication: *a* is M, where M is something sufficient to render ‘*a* is M’ a member of moral discourse. Since *a* is M, something is M; that is, something has the property M. So there is a moral property M. Anyone who believes there are moral truths, then, earns the right to speak of there being moral properties in this very weak and uninteresting sense. If we want properties that can serve as truthmakers (or be definitive of realism), we need something in the neighborhood of universals, tropes, or natural classes.

respect from any world where ‘*a* is M’ is false. The metaphysical difference will involve whether the moral property M is instantiated by *a*. If M is a real feature of the world (the sort of thing the realist but not the anti-realist believes in), then it can figure into the metaphysical commitments that accompany moral judgments.

Hence, moral realists typically endorse the existence of moral facts or moral properties (in the relevant metaphysically loaded senses). Such things provide the ontological grounds for moral truth. Moral truths are true in virtue of the existence of such properties and facts. The internal debate between naturalists and non-naturalists is over the nature of those facts and properties. One thinks a single class of natural facts and properties can serve a double-duty truthmaking role for both moral and natural truths. The other thinks that natural properties and facts are not the right sort of beast to make moral judgments true. What both kinds of realist agree upon is that their moral realism is due to their ontological commitment to moral facts and/or properties. Such things are what make moral judgments true. As we saw in the last chapter, it’s not just the fact that realists offer truthmakers for moral truths that makes them realists. What also matters is the nature of the truthmakers they offer. What seems to be common to most realist views about ethics is that they take moral truthmakers to be mind-independent facts—facts involving either the natural world or an independent realm of moral fact. The differences between the realist’s truthmakers and the anti-realist’s will become apparent when we turn to the latter sort of view.

### 5.2.2. Classical non-cognitivism

Before turning to more contemporary forms of metaethical anti-realism, let us take a look at those anti-realist views that flourished during Dreier’s “Good Old Days”. We may

commence with A. J. Ayer, whose classical emotivism about the ethical is a jumping off point for many contemporary anti-realists, most notably the quasi-realists. Here is a characteristic passage from *Language, Truth and Logic*:

We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgements. It is not because they have an “absolute” validity which is mysteriously independent of ordinary sense-experience, but because they have no objective validity whatsoever. If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false. And we have seen that sentences which simply express moral judgements do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. They are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable—because they do not express genuine propositions. (1952: 108-109)

Ayer’s anti-realism about ethics is grounded entirely in his broader verificationist views about meaning. Where statements do not meet his criterion for empirical verifiability, they are dismissed as being in some sense meaningless, that sense being that they express no proposition, and hence fail to be either true or false.<sup>16</sup> Ayer, siding with Moore (1903), argues that ethical concepts are irreducible to empirical concepts; as such, ethical concepts are “pseudo-concepts” and statements that employ them do not express propositions.<sup>17</sup> When reality is limited, in good positivistic fashion, to the empirical, nothing could possibly make ethical judgments true. To the extent that someone like Ayer would even countenance talk of truthmakers, we can say on his behalf that the only truthmakers there are are empirical (for everything is a truthmaker, and everything, for Ayer, is empirical). Ethical judgments do not express empirical propositions, and so express nothing meaningful at all. Ayer goes on to give an analysis of what ethical language is up to (its job is to express sentiment, not fact),

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Carnap: “a value statement is nothing else than a command in a misleading grammatical form. It may have effects upon the actions of men, and these effects may either be in accordance with our wishes or not; but it is neither true nor false” (1935: 24). See also Barnes 1934 and Russell 1935: 242-248.

<sup>17</sup>More precisely: “in so far as statements of value are significant, they are ordinary “scientific” statements; and that in so far as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false” (Ayer 1952: 102-103).

but that analysis places ethical discourse squarely outside the domain of truth and falsity. Since ethical judgments are not true, they do not have truthmakers. Given that there are no true ethical judgments, there is no need to posit any ethical ontology upon which to ground them. Any moral reality there could be would be unempirical and thus, by Ayer's lights, no reality at all. Ayer is thus an anti-realist *par excellence* in our sense; there simply is no part of reality that is correctly described in ethical terms. If there were, there would be true propositions about it. If we are understanding realism primarily as a metaphysical doctrine, then there is no way to be more anti-realist than to deny that there is no metaphysical dimension to ethical discourse whatsoever.

Usually classed alongside Ayer's, Charles Stevenson's work (e.g., his 1937 and 1944) also stresses the emotive role of ethical discourse.<sup>18</sup> Stevenson distinguishes between *descriptive* and *dynamic* uses of language. The former typically communicates beliefs, whereas the latter vents emotions and effects action (1937: 21). What distinguishes ethical judgments is their "emotive meaning", which is intended to produce affective responses in their audiences. Their primary purpose is not to describe the world or to communicate beliefs. Hence: "A man uses an ethical judgment in order to exert an influence. He can be "refuted" only by being led to exert a different kind of influence, or else to exert no influence at all" (1938: 51). By way of contrast, a physicist presumably is "refuted" by being shown facts which falsify his theory. Stevenson is suggesting that when it comes to ethical discourse, the judgments of the domain are not aiming to describe the world, and hence are not open to refutation by the discovery of facts about the world.

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<sup>18</sup>Though their two views converged, they arose from different springs. Whereas Ayer drew his ideas from the radical empiricism espoused by the Vienna Circle, Stevenson's work emerged from the pragmatist tradition, specifically the work of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (1946). See also Hare's prescriptivism (1952), which is usually coupled with the non-cognitivism of Ayer and Stevenson.

That said, Stevenson shies away from Ayer's cavalier pronouncement that ethical judgments lack truth-values: "the remark, "ethical judgments are neither true nor false," is absurd. Those who have insisted on the remark have spoken with an insensitivity to the ways of our language" (1963: 219; see also his 1944: 169-173).<sup>19</sup> The ways of our language to which Stevenson is referring (and to which he admits being sometimes insensitive himself) is the familiar equivalence between '*p*' and 'It is true that *p*'. When I judge that liberty is good, you are free to reply that what I said is true. To deny applications of 'is true' to ethical judgments is to offend against ordinary linguistic practice.<sup>20</sup> Even though Stevenson allows ethical judgments a truth-value, he does not thereby think he has dispensed with non-cognitivism, broadly understood as the class of views that assign ethical judgments an emotive meaning. But he does think that we have to ask "in what sense" ethical judgments are true or false (1963: 217). Positing different senses of truth is at odds with a standard deflationary approach to truth, to which Stevenson seems to be appealing when he invokes Ramsey in defense of the equivalence between '*p*' and 'It is true that *p*'.<sup>21</sup> Still, what Stevenson has in mind is something along the following lines: The primary function of ethical judgments is to effect certain kinds of affects, not to describe some ethical portion of reality. As such, the "truths" of ethical discourse are not grounded in reality in the way that

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<sup>19</sup>Many have noted an apparent irony in Ayer's subscribing both to a deflationary theory of truth *and* the thesis that ethical judgments lack truth-values. See Boghossian 1990, Stoljar 1993, Dreier 2004, and Chrisman 2008. In fact, *all* the major non-cognitivists sided with Ramsey on the topic of truth. See Ayer 1952: 87-90, Stevenson 1963: 219, and Hare 1981: 213.

<sup>20</sup>Here we encounter the beginnings of the infamous "Frege-Geach" problem for non-cognitivism. See Geach 1960 and 1965, and Searle 1969: 136-141. The Frege-Geach problem is but a species of the more general problem involving what Bar-On (2004) calls "semantic continuity". Ethical discourse seems to share all the same semantic trappings of other non-ethical domains.

<sup>21</sup>Why should deflationists eschew different senses of truth? Because deflationism is motivated by the idea that there is nothing, really, to the notion of truth, let alone there being *several* different notions of truth. Cf. Wright: "Truth cannot admit of variable realisation if, as for the deflationist, there is nothing substantial in which it *ever* consists. For deflationism, pluralism will seem merely to compound the errors of its more traditional antagonists" (1996: 925).

other descriptive judgments (such as ‘Snow is white’) are. Thus, ethical judgments are not tied up with ontology. They have no ontological implications. To think otherwise is to conflate their emotive and descriptive (if any) meanings. Accordingly, Stevenson’s view is also thoroughly anti-realistic. It posits no ethical reality, and holds that true ethical judgments require none. Alongside Ayer, Stevenson would claim that a search after “moral truthmakers” is misguided. Perhaps, then, Stevenson is better understood as advocating moral truths as being non-discriminating. Their truth makes no metaphysical difference to the world. If so, then their truth is nowise grounded in reality, thereby securing Stevenson’s moral anti-realism. We shall evaluate the tenability of this position below; for now we need only appreciate that such a line maintains the existence of moral truth by taking it to be a brute feature about the world.

### 5.2.3. Error theory

Next up we may consider error theory, most ably defended by J. L. Mackie (1946 and 1977; see also Joyce 2001). According to Mackie, it is at least part of the meaning of ordinary ethical judgments that they have some claim to objectivity. When I judge that something is good, I do not simply emote, or express my own preferences. Rather, I claim that that something is objectively good, in some sense that transcends my own subjective preferences, desires, and emotions. On ontological grounds, Mackie denies that there are any objective values. But since the existence of those things is presupposed by ordinary moral judgments, those judgments are false:

the denial of objective values will have to be put forward not as the result of an analytic approach, but as an ‘error theory’, a theory that although most people in making moral judgements implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to

something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false. It is this that makes the name ‘moral scepticism’ appropriate. (1977: 35)

Mackie therefore breaks with his positivistic predecessors canvassed above in thinking that moral judgments are not meaningless, but just false.<sup>22</sup> Discussion of Mackie’s work usually presents his view as a semantic one: the *meaning* of moral judgments presupposes the existence of objective moral judgments. On that reading, moral judgments have truth-conditions that go unfulfilled. But we can also approach the view metaphysically, setting aside any (potentially quite controversial) claims about the meaning of moral judgments. On the alternative metaphysical reading, Mackie is offering an account of what kinds of truthmakers there would have to be if ordinary moral judgments were to be true. In Mackie’s famous “argument from queerness”, he gives an account of what objective values would have to be, if they existed. An objective value would be

such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both direction and an overriding motive; something’s being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it. An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow build into it. (1977: 40)

If there were such objective values, they could serve as truthmakers for ethical judgments.

Suppose, for instance, that objective values were understood as universals. (Mackie himself leans on an understanding of Platonic forms, or, in modern parlance, transcendent universals.)

Suppose, then, that the universal *goodness* exists. Then certain objects or events can

instantiate it. If such a view were happy with states of affairs, then those states of affairs that

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<sup>22</sup>It is tempting to characterize views like Mackie’s as entailing that all moral judgments are false. But we should be careful in our formulation, as we saw above in section 4.3.4. For example, if ‘*a* is *F*’ is some false moral predication, then its negation is true. But, presumably, both sentences belong to the moral domain if one of them does. Cf. Dreier: “To be precise, the moral judgments with existential commitment to moral properties are all false. Strictly speaking, the moral judgment that no activity is ever wrong unless it causes harm to others is true, according to Mackie, since no activity is ever wrong at all” (2004: 43, endnote 1). It seems, then, that Sayre-McCord’s account of realism (1986: 3) commits him to the view that Mackie is a realist. Cf. Cameron 2008d: 117.

combine *goodness* with the things it instantiates would be perfectly adequate truthmakers for moral judgments. For instance, suppose it is true that the rescue of some drowning child was good. There is a state of affairs—the non-mereological union of the event with *goodness*—that guarantees the truth of the truth. (Similarly, one might instead take there to be goodness tropes, which would then serve as truthmakers for moral judgments.) But the existence of such entities, Mackie argues, is metaphysically queer, and out of step with our best ontological understanding of the world (namely, naturalism, or something near enough). Without such entities, there is nothing to make true our ordinary moral judgments. Hence, they are false.

According to the two canonical paradigms of ethical anti-realism, there are no moral truths. As such, there are no moral truthmakers. Our realists, by way of contrast, embrace moral truths and have moral truthmakers on offer. Recall Sayre-McCord's claim (1986: 3) that realism about the moral domain involves just thinking that there are literal moral truths. So far we have canvassed two kinds of moral realist who embrace moral truth, and two kinds of moral anti-realists who eschew moral truth. But the Good Old Days have passed, and now many anti-realists in the ethical domain admit that there are ethical truths (e.g., Blackburn, Gibbard, Mark Timmons, and Wright). Furthermore, there are constructivist views (relativist and absolutist) that maintain the existence of moral truth, and yet fail to own up to the commitments of moral realism. The existence of moral truth, then, is not sufficient to draw the distinction between realism and its opposition. Hence, we should adopt the shift to thinking about moral realism in terms of moral truthmakers.

#### 5.2.4. Moral relativism

Consider now the moral relativist, who may be plausibly thought of as a moral anti-realist who upholds the existence of (relative) moral truth.<sup>23</sup> Here is how Gilbert Harman presents the view:

moral right and wrong (good and bad, justice and injustice, virtue and vice, etc.) are always relative to a choice of moral framework. What is morally right in relation to one moral framework can be morally wrong in relation to a different moral framework. And no moral framework is objectively privileged as the one true morality. (Harman and Thomson 1996: 3)

Moral judgments, if they are to have any chance at being true, must be understood elliptically.

It's not the case that something bears (or does not bear) some moral property *simpliciter*.

Rather, it bears (or does not bear) a moral property only relative to some moral framework.<sup>24</sup>

Moral claims are thus on a par with claims about motion and mass, from a relativistic perspective. Suppose I judge that some action A is bad. A might be bad relative to framework F<sub>1</sub>, but good relative to framework F<sub>2</sub>. If so, then we have some relativistic moral truths: A is bad with respect to F<sub>1</sub>, and A is good with respect to F<sub>2</sub>.

Let us get into focus one moral truth for discussion. Suppose I am a thoroughgoing Kantian and judge that lying is wrong. Lying is not wrong in and of itself (nothing is for the relativist), but it is wrong in the Kantian framework. So my judgment is true: lying is wrong with respect to thoroughgoing Kantian ethics. So we have at least one instance of a moral truth:

- (1) Lying is wrong [with respect to thoroughgoing Kantian ethics].

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<sup>23</sup>But see Sayre-McCord 1986 for an account of what sorts of conditions should lead one to see relativism as a form of realism. (Basically, if relativists are correct about the *semantics* of moral discourse, then their view constitutes realism.)

<sup>24</sup>Harman spells out the details somewhat differently in his 1975. See also Wong's formulation (1984, 2006).

Relativism, as is familiar, struggles in making sense of moral disagreement. A sociopathic egoist may reject the claim that lying is wrong, and may very well be correct to do so. For he may be prepared to assent to:

(2) Lying is not wrong [with respect to sociopathic egoist ethics].

When our egoist judges that lying is not wrong, he expresses something captured by **2**, whereas the dutiful Kantian's judgment that lying is wrong is best captured by **1**. Now, fully exposed, **1** and **2** do not contradict one another, even though our Kantian and sociopath may be coming to blows over the matter. Both are even true; what they really disagree about is which moral framework we ought to adopt (a matter over which there is no fact of the matter). Still, **1** is true. Now we must ask the truthmaker question: in virtue of what is **1** true?

The answer will depend on how we understand the nature of moral frameworks, and the details of that I leave to specific relativists. But here is one simple model for understanding what makes **1** true.<sup>25</sup> We might understand the thoroughgoing Kantian ethical framework as being a network of hypotheses, some ethical and some not. Let us suppose, then, that frameworks are understood as sets of sentences.<sup>26</sup> For example, it might consist of the following claims:

(3) Actions are wrong if and only if they are not universalizable.

(4) Lying is not universalizable.

Note that **3** involves the moral term 'wrong', and thus should not be thought of as being true, since it's unrelativized. **4** seems to be something of a logical truth, falling out of the

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Boghossian 2006b.

<sup>26</sup>Or we might construe frameworks as sets of rules, and understand morality as on a par with games like chess. Chess is defined by its rules; bishops move diagonally, for instance. What status does 'Bishops move diagonally' have? Does it express a proposition? Is it stipulated to be true? Regardless of how we answer these questions, the fact that 'Bishops move diagonally' features in the rules of chess (however we understand that) accounts for why 'In chess, bishops move diagonally' is straightforwardly true. The rules of chess, whatever their ontological status, make it true that bishops move diagonally in chess.

definitions of ‘lying’ and ‘universalizability’, as we demonstrate to our undergraduate ethics students. It follows from **3** and **4** that lying is wrong, in the sense that *if* both were true, then it would be true that lying is wrong. Because ‘Lying is wrong’ follows from sentences of the framework of thoroughgoing Kantian ethics, **1** is true. Put another way, given that **3** is a member of the framework of thoroughgoing Kantian ethics,

- (3') Actions are wrong with respect to thoroughgoing Kantian ethics if and only if they are not universalizable.

is true. And **3'** and **4** together entail **1**.

In many cases, we may need to bring in information outside the framework in order to explain the truth of some moral judgment. For example, it may be wrong for me to tell Bill that Cheney is a gorilla. Now, such an action is wrong because Cheney is not a gorilla, and I do not believe that Cheney is a gorilla. Hence, my saying so to Bill would constitute a lie, and thus would be wrong according to the thoroughgoing Kantian framework. But the fact that Cheney is not a gorilla is no part of the thoroughgoing Kantian ethical framework (so far as I know!). So perhaps a better answer is that some unrelativized moral judgment *p* is true in a framework just in case *p* follows from the axioms of the framework, taken together with a certain class of non-moral facts. Again, my task is not to supply the details. But we now have an approximation of what it is, if anything, that makes moral judgments true. True moral judgments are only those that are indexed to some ethical framework. Those frameworks, together with whatever non-moral facts are needed to entail the unrelativized moral judgments, are responsible for the truth of moral judgments.

**1** is true in virtue of the mini-framework given by **3** and **4**. In every world in which that framework exists, ‘Lying is wrong’ follows from its axioms, and hence **1** is true. Here, it seems that the framework itself is the truthmaker or **1**. As for my lying to Bill about Cheney,

what makes it true that doing so is wrong in the thoroughgoing Kantian framework is the framework taken together with whatever it is that makes it true that Cheney is not a gorilla, and what makes it true that I believe truly on the matter. Presumably Cheney himself makes it true that he is not a gorilla, and my belief that he is not a gorilla makes it true that I believe he is not a gorilla. So here we have the sum of the framework, Cheney, and my belief that serves as a truthmaker for ‘It would be wrong [with respect to thoroughgoing Kantian ethics] for me to tell Bill that Cheney is a gorilla’.

What the foregoing brings out is how blandly logical moral judgments can appear on the relativist’s conception.<sup>27</sup> Moral judgments look to be on a par with sentences like ‘According to the rules of chess, bishops move diagonally’ and ‘According to the Harry Potter novels, the Hogwarts Express leaves from Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  at King’s Cross Station’. One might wonder how the relativist can capture the normativity supposed to accompany moral judgments, and how genuine moral disagreement is possible. But setting such worries about the view aside (it is not my aim to defend the view), it is at least easy to see how to offer a truthmaking account of relativistic moral judgments. In many cases, the judgments amount to nothing more than (something like) mere logical claims. If so, the existence of the frameworks themselves suffice to ground the truth of moral claims. If non-logical facts enter into the picture (as with Cheney’s not being a gorilla), then we need to bring in more truthmakers, but none of those will be distinctly *moral* truthmakers. Cheney makes *Cheney is not a gorilla* true, and nothing more than the thoroughgoing Kantian framework is needed in addition to account for truth of *It’s wrong according to thoroughgoing Kantian ethics to lie*

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<sup>27</sup>Indeed, their austere logical nature may render them analytic truths, in which case they escape our truthmaking discussion. But maybe the frameworks and their consequences can be understood in a synthetic way. Perhaps: moral frameworks are not sets of propositions, but sets of actual beliefs that are widespread in a given community.

*about Cheney not being a gorilla.* The frameworks themselves are ontologically innocuous, in the sense that opponents of the framework should be just as happy to accept their existence as the defenders of the framework. Hence, the moral relativist needs no additions to his non-moral ontology to ground the truth of moral judgments. After all, the frameworks themselves are not true, and don't have to be true in order for moral judgments to be true in them.<sup>28</sup> It is now easy to see why many consider relativists to be anti-realists; the only metaphysical substance to moral views amounts to there being certain logical relations between propositions in particular moral systems that (while not true) people adopt. Relativists need not invoke any kind of moral reality in order to ground the truth of moral judgments. Indeed, relativism could very easily be married to an error theory about non-relative moral judgments.

#### 5.2.5. Constructivism

Relativists are sometimes described as a kind of moral constructivist. There are moral truths, and they are “constructed” out of existing moral frameworks. Such relativistic constructions lack the absoluteness or “objectivity” belonging to the metaethical views usually laboring under the banner of constructivism. I shall refer to such objectivist views as being constructivist *simpliciter*, as is typically done. Just like any other “ism”, constructivism is in no way a single unified metaethical view. But we may point to some common themes and exemplars. Constructivists oppose realism by arguing that there is no mind-independent moral reality (natural or non-natural) to be discovered and described. They oppose classical non-cognitivism by taking moral judgments to be truth-apt, and oppose error theory by taking

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<sup>28</sup>If frameworks are understood as propositions or sentences or some other kind of truth-bearer, then it might be thought that they are things that need to be made true, not things that make other things true. But recall that everything is a truthmaker. Truth-bearers play double duty as both the subject and object of the truthmaking relation.

some moral judgments to be true. Constructivists tend to uphold a more “objective” conception of morality than do “subjectivist” relativists. Still, they hold that moral truth and reality is essentially dependent upon the practices and goings-on of moral agents like us—and here emerges the constructivist’s anti-realist credentials. But the moral truths themselves, constructions though they are, are taken very seriously, and emerge as having a non-relative, non-subjectivist standing (and here the claim to objectivity is invoked).

As for proponents of constructivist views, there is Roderick Firth’s ideal observer theory, which construes

statements of the form “x is P,” in which P is some particular ethical predicate, to be identical in meaning with statements of the form: “Any ideal observer would react to x in such and such a way under such and such conditions”. (1952: 321)

Many contemporary Kantians also consider themselves to be constructivists. Christine Korsgaard argues that moral truths “spring from the nature of the will—the principles of practical reasoning” (1996: 36). Taking his cue from some tentative and highly guarded remarks of John Rawls (1980: 569 and 1985: 230), Ronald Milo (1995) defends a view he calls “contractarian constructivism”:

*Contractarian constructivism*, as I shall call it, holds that moral truths are most plausibly construed as truths about an ideal social order, rather than the natural (or some curious nonnatural) order of things. It is true (or is a fact) that a certain kind of act is wrong, for example, just in case a social order prohibiting such acts would be chosen by rational contractors under suitably idealized conditions. [...] The objectivity of the moral principles so constructed consists not in their being grounded in an independently existing moral order that explains why the process of construction leads to an agreement on these principles. Rather, the objectivity of these moral principles consists simply in their rational acceptability from an impartial social point of view. (1995: 184-185)

Shafer-Landau offers a helpful summary of the overall constructivist program:

Constructivists endorse the reality of a domain, but explain this by invoking a *constructive function* out of which the reality is created. This function has moral reality as its output. What distinguishes constructivist theories from one another are

the different views about the proper input. Subjectivists claim that individual tastes and opinions are the things out of which moral reality is constructed. Relativists cite various conventions or social agreements. Kantians cite the workings of the rational will. Contractarians cite the edicts of deliberators situated in special circumstances of choice. What is common to all constructivists is the idea that moral reality is constituted by the attitudes, actions, responses, or outlooks of persons, possibly under idealized conditions. In short, moral reality is constructed from the states or activities (understood very broadly) undertaken from a preferred standpoint. The absence of this standpoint signifies the absence of moral reality. (2003: 14)

Like the projectivists we shall meet later, constructivists think that understanding *our* attitudes, values, abilities, and stances is paramount for understanding moral thought.

Constructivists go further by arguing that moral reality is *constructed* out of or *constituted* by those attitudes and values. Hence, constructivists must maintain the truth of certain counterfactuals that turn on the dependency (or lack thereof) between moral reality and moral attitudes and values. Had we not had the faculty of practical reasoning that we do, or the same kinds of attitudes and values, then moral reality would have been different, says the constructivist.

Constructivism at first appears to offer a fairly straightforward set of answers to our truthmaking questions. Milo, for one, is explicit about this: “Contractarian constructivism is a metaethical theory about the subject matter of moral judgments, about what sort of facts makes them true” (1995: 189).<sup>29</sup> Later, Milo writes: “The fact that an act violates [the norms chosen by hypothetical ideal contractors] is not just evidence of its wrongness; it is the truth maker for the claim that it is wrong” (1995: 202). Though he employs the language of truthmaking here, Milo is not bringing to bear a systematic account of truthmaking to his metaethics—that task is our own. But his preferred language is some confirmation of our present hypothesis, that debates about moral realism are (at least in part) debates about

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<sup>29</sup>But notice that this statement itself might be conflating semantic issues (the subject matter of ethical judgments) with metaphysical issues (the truthmakers of ethical judgments).

truthmakers. Constructivists are clear that they believe that moral facts are constituted or grounded by us, or at least some idealized version of us.

Consider this moral judgment (a favorite of Blackburn's), and let us agree that it is true:

- (5) It is wrong to kick dogs.

Firth would say what **5** means the same as:

- (6) Any ideal observer would judge that kicking dogs is wrong.

We can set aside the (I would say dubious) semantic claim about whether **5** and **6** share the same meaning. What is more relevant for us is that, according to the constructivist, if **6** is true, then **5** is true as well. So whatever it is that makes **6** true will be a truthmaker for **5**. The contractarian might wish to substitute the judgments of the ideal observer with the judgments of a group of dispassionate contractors operating in the original position, behind a veil of ignorance, etc. We can call this group the 'Committee'. According to the contractarian constructivist, **5** is true because **7** is true:

- (7) The Committee would decide on a system of norms that renders kicking dogs impermissible.

So whatever makes **7** true will carry over as a truthmaker for **5**.

Constructivists appear, then, to have a good chance at answering our truthmaking inquiries. The truthmakers for moral judgments are the decisions that would be made by an ideal observer, the Committee, or something of similar stripe. But the constructivist's answer to our question also brings into focus a central objection to the view. The first thing to notice about constructivist theories is how the truth of moral judgments is derived from the truth of certain counterfactuals. The Committee doesn't exist, and neither does an ideal observer. Neither, then, do their decisions. Hence, the truths about what sorts of judgments and

decisions they would make are all counterfactual: if there were such a committee, then it would judge in thus-and-so a manner. Anyone with a penchant for truthmaker investigations knows to be suspicious of such bald appeals to counterfactuals. Phenomenalists appealed to counterfactuals to ground claims about unobserved objects. Behaviorists appealed to counterfactuals to ground claims about dispositions. The flight to counterfactuals only pushes the question back a step. Suppose the Committee would in fact look unfavorably upon kicking dogs for fun. What makes *that* claim true?

One option is to take the counterfactual as brute. It has no ontological ground supporting it. It's not true in virtue of anything; it's just a fundamental feature of the world, completely inexplicable. On this reading, the relevant moral counterfactuals are non-discriminating. Taking this route would secure the constructivist's anti-realist credentials, but at an extreme theoretical cost. A second option, only slightly less unsavory, is to take the counterfactual to be made true by a counterfactual fact (understood metaphysically).<sup>30</sup> Here we would have an ontological ground for our counterfactual, albeit one that is posited solely to be a truthmaker for the truth in question. It would be hard to see the motivation for the view. Why, for instance, do brute counterfactual facts fare any better than simply positing, alongside the non-naturalistic realist, brute ethical facts?

The more satisfying response to our inquiry would be to offer an ontological ground for sentences like **6** and **7** that does not resort to any extravagant or *ad hoc* ontological additions. But in trying to do so, we run head-on into a fundamental objection to constructivist theories. The problem is a direct descendent of Plato's Euthyphro problem,

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<sup>30</sup>Russell had qualms about negative facts, though he embraced them in the end. But counterfactual facts? That might just be a contradiction in terms. Lange (2009) speaks of "subjunctive facts", but has in mind only the linguistic conception of a fact. Surely there are subjunctive facts in that sense (since there are truths in the subjunctive mood). But a subjunctive fact in the metaphysical sense seems like a category mistake. Being subjunctive is a trait of linguistic items, not worldly items (the linguistic items of the world excepted).

which we met at the very beginning of our project. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates and Euthyphro agree that all and only things that are pious are beloved by all the gods. Even granting the coextension of the two predicates, there remains a further question: Are things pious because they are beloved by the gods, or are things beloved by the gods because they are pious? The question is one of ontological ground, and metaphysical dependence. On the first answer, piety is constituted by being god-beloved. What it is to be pious is no more and no less than to be loved by the gods. On the second answer, piety is more fundamental, such that an act's being pious explains why the gods love it, and not the other way round. In the present case, we are assuming that the Committee is morally infallible. In point of fact, whatever the Committee approves of is morally sound. Whatever the Committee forbids is morally wrong. The relevant question is whether things have the moral properties they do *because of* the Committee's judgment, or whether the Committee makes the judgments that they do because of the moral properties that things have. Constructivists are clear in endorsing the first answer to the Euthyphro question. Recall Milo's admission that the fact that some act violates the Committee's norms is what makes it true that something is wrong (1995: 202).

The Euthyphro contrast raises a problem for constructivist theories. We are embracing the view that morality is in fact entirely dependent upon the will of the Committee. Since the morality of certain actions is entirely dependent upon the Committee's judgment, the following sorts of counterfactuals are true: If the Committee had endorsed slavery, then slavery would have been permissible. If the Committee had outlawed philanthropy, then philanthropy would have been wrong. Such counterfactuals are the logical fallout of the Committee's opinions being constitutive of morality. To the detriment of constructivist views, such counterfactuals also need to be squared with the following requirement: constructed

truths must be metaphysically mandated. Though they are constructed, they could not have been otherwise. Here is Paul Boghossian:

it is in principle possible to combine a constructivism about a given fact P with the view that we were somehow metaphysically constrained to construct P, once we had considered the question. But, as I also pointed out, the social constructivist is not interested in such mandated constructions. His whole point is to emphasize the dependence of any fact on our *contingent* social needs and interests, so that if our needs and interests had been different then so, too, would have been the relevant facts. (2006a: 39)

What Boghossian here says is in principle possible turns out to be required. The constructivist's overall view is that although there are facts of a certain domain, those facts are reflections and constructions of the contingent factors that bring them into existence. No Committee, no morality. But this view is metaphysically impossible. Suppose that the Committee judges that *p*, and so *p* is a constructed moral fact. Suppose also that *p* is metaphysically contingent, in that *p* was not metaphysically mandated (it's a product of our contingent circumstances, after all). Now the following possibility emerges. The Committee judges that *p*. And so it is a fact that *p*. But the Committee was not metaphysically mandated to judge that *p*. So it is possible that another committee, the Others, judges that it's not the case that *p*. And so it is a fact that it's not the case that *p*. Given that the decisions of these two committees are not metaphysically mandated, it follows that it's possible that inconsistent facts could be constructed. But that is impossible. Inconsistencies, constructed or not, are metaphysically impossible. If there are any "constructed facts", they must be metaphysically mandatory. As Boghossian rightly observes (2006a: 40), it doesn't matter that in fact no competing communities, committees, or whatever has constructed conflicting facts. All that matters is that it is in principle possible to do so, which violates the necessity of non-contradiction.

On pain of contradiction, then, the constructivist must hold that his constructed facts are metaphysically necessary. That consequence is already out of the spirit of his view, but let us press on. The Committee is now charged with the task of making metaphysically mandatory judgments. If it's possible for the Committee to produce the wrong results, then the Committee's decisions are not in fact constitutive of morality. So it must be impossible for the Committee to do things like allow slavery. The dilemma for constructivism arises in trying to explain why. Either the Committee arrives at its decisions via completely non-moral considerations, or they import moral considerations into their decision making process. If the former, then there looks to be no way to guarantee that they will prohibit slavery and allow philanthropy. It must be impossible for them to do otherwise:

If the responses of idealized agents justified ethnic cleansing, or a policy that entirely discounted the needs of the vulnerable, then there is something wrong with the idealization. The resulting theory is either not a moral theory at all, or a false one. (Shafer-Landau 2003: 41)

Recall that not only must the Committee give the right verdict in paradigm cases, it must be impossible for them to do anything else. If the latter, then moral considerations transcend the Committee, and so constructivism is false after all. Thinking about the Committee is a handy heuristic for tracking moral status, but is not constitutive of it.

The worry, then, is that the constructivist faces the possibly unanswerable challenge of giving an adequate account of just what the Committee is such that it both does not import any moral considerations into its deliberations (thereby giving up the game of constructivism) and also guarantees that the Committee will necessarily give the correct judgments in paradigm cases. It must be impossible for them to have done otherwise. The challenge, I believe, can be understood in terms of truthmaking. What is it that makes it true that the Committee necessarily judges thus-and-so? The realist opposition has in mind an answer to

the question: something moral that is conceptually and metaphysically prior to the workings of the Committee. The constructivist, like the behaviorist and phenomenalist before him, retreats to counterfactuals, about what we would judge if we were so positioned. But this is no escape from the truthmaker theorist's question. In virtue of what are those counterfactuals true? Our demand is for a metaphysical accounting of why the Committee does what it does. Constructivists, I think, have not offered a solid reply to this sort of worry. Viewed through the lens of truthmaker theory, constructivist metaethics looks to rest on unstable metaphysical ground.

#### 5.2.6. Superassertibility

Next let us turn to the work of Wright (1988a, 1992, 1995). Wright rejects non-cognitivism on the grounds that ethical judgments satisfy certain basic platitudes about assertoric discourses. For instance, they may be negated, embedded in conditionals, and used as premises in arguments. Further, Wright thinks it is in general wrong to ascribe widespread, systematic error to those operating within the normal bounds of a discipline such as ethical thought. Wright asks rhetorically: "why insist on construing *truth* for moral discourse in terms which motivate a charge of global error, rather than explicate it in terms of the satisfaction of [some] putative subsidiary norm, whatever it is?" (1995: 211). If we set the standards for moral truth as high as Mackie does, we are compelled to find moral thinking engaged in systematic error. A better, more charitable alternative is to think that moral thought does not operate with such massive error, and instead successfully accomplishes its actual, more modest task.

So what does Wright think moral truth is, since it's not what Mackie says it is? Here, Wright adopts a pluralist (or "functionalist") account of truth. What it is to be a truth predicate is to satisfy certain minimal constraints or platitudes (1992: 34; 1995: 215-216; 2001: 760). Truths have to admit of negation, conditionalization, and the like. They must correspond with the facts. Truth itself has to be stable, not come in degrees, and be distinct from justification. Any predicate that satisfies the list of platitudes counts as a truth predicate. The crucial move of Wright's is that he thinks that different domains of discourse operate with distinct truth predicates, such that some discourses operate with truth predicates that have application conditions going beyond the minimal constraints.<sup>31</sup> Wright leans most heavily on the correspondence platitude in articulating what he thinks about moral truth. It is a platitude, Wright claims, that truths correspond to the facts. However, admitting this harmless truism should not compel us to adopt whole hog a correspondence theory of truth. Wright thinks that there is a very minimal understanding of the correspondence platitude, such that even the most deflationary of deflationists can accept it. That minimal understanding must be upheld by any candidate for a truth predicate, and can be upheld because "the permissibility of correspondence phraseology as paraphrase of "true" is the merest by-product of the minimal platitudes" (1992: 143). In its weakest version, the correspondence platitude holds that 'is true' and 'corresponds to the facts' are just two ways of saying the same thing.<sup>32</sup> However, some truth predicates may adopt a more substantive reading of the correspondence platitude. Specifically, some disciplines may require the correspondence to be robustly representational, and some disciplines may require the facts involved to be metaphysically robust.

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. the pluralism found in Lynch 2009.

<sup>32</sup>Recall our earlier discussion of the correspondence platitude in section 2.4.

We must be careful about what ‘robust’ means here. What is it for a discourse to embrace a “robust” correspondence relation? Wright understands a robust correspondence relation in terms of what he calls *cognitive command*. A discourse exhibits cognitive command if and only if it is *a priori* that any dispute (unrelated to vagueness) that may occur over some claim of the domain is due to some cognitive shortcoming (1992: 144). The idea is that when the aim of a domain of discourse is to represent, disagreements over what has been represented must be due to someone’s having failed to represent correctly. If a copy machine produces a defective image, then the machine has malfunctioned somehow. If the same original produces different outputs in different copy machines, then something is wrong with at least one of the copiers. Wright’s suggestion is that one (probably necessary but insufficient) mark of realist discourse is that the judgments of the discourse aim to be representational. Consequently, the discourse will manifest cognitive command, for differences in opinion that arise over some statement of the domain will be due to some malfunction in the representational processes underlying the competing judgments. In anti-realist domains, the aim is not representation, and thus the domain may not exhibit cognitive command. If so, differences in opinion may well be intractable; no amount of added information will resolve the dispute. Wright can charge Mackie with illegitimately attributing cognitive command to moral discourse. Mackie thinks that we aim and fail to represent moral reality when we make moral judgments; Wright thinks we never so aim, and thus do not fail. Whatever the aim of moral discourse is, we succeed in doing *that*, and that’s why there’s moral truth. But we can maintain moral anti-realism because the aim of moral discourse is not representational, which is a hallmark of realism.

The second way to amplify the correspondence platitude is to adopt a more robust account of facts. Wright's approach to facts does not engage the traditional metaphysical debate over facts. One might have thought that the distinction between robust and non-robust facts tracks the distinction between *linguistic* facts understood merely as *truths* and *metaphysical* facts understood along the lines of Armstrong's states of affairs (i.e., as *truthmakers*). But that is not Wright's concern. Instead, Wright spells out robustness in terms of explanatory power.<sup>33</sup> Robust facts are facts that have explanatory capacities that extend beyond their home domain. Realists and anti-realists alike can grant that moral facts help to explain moral beliefs. Moral realists bear the burden of showing how moral facts can "contribute to the explanation of things *other than* moral beliefs" (1995: 223). If so, then moral facts exhibit *wide cosmological role*, which is another mark of realism.

For Wright, moral discourse does not exhibit cognitive command, and moral facts have narrow cosmological role. He concludes that moral realism is false. Hence, while there are moral truths and moral facts, the truth predicate operating in ethical thought is quite minimal. Though moral truths correspond to the facts, the correspondence is not representational, and the facts themselves are explanatorily impotent at explaining beliefs other than those strictly falling into the moral domain. Wright is best understood as trying to legitimate the presence of a satisfied truth predicate in moral discourse, thereby earning the anti-realist's right to moral truth back from non-cognitivists and error theorists who tried to banish it. In fact, Wright thinks that the truth predicate governing ethical discourse is best understood in terms of *superassertibility* (1995). A statement is superassertible

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<sup>33</sup>Hence, Wright does not ever say what he thinks facts are. This is unfortunate, given how much misunderstanding trades on conflating the various senses of 'fact'.

if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information. (1992: 48)

Superassertibility is thus an epistemically constrained notion of truth; the truth to be found in domains governed by superassertibility cannot outstrip our possible evidence. For Wright, then, what it is for a moral judgment to be true is simply that it be superassertible. Nothing else is required.<sup>34</sup>

Though it is not Wright's question, *our* question is: Since we are now supposing there to be moral truths, what is it that makes them true? For example, let us continue to suppose that **5** is true:

(5) It is wrong to kick dogs.

Now let us follow Wright in thinking that moral truth amounts merely to superassertibility, and not anything more robust. If **5** is a moral truth, then **5** is superassertible. Hence the following is true:

(8) That it is wrong to kick dogs is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information.

As a first pass to the question of what makes **5** true, Wright may offer **8**. In effect, **5** is true because it's superassertible, which is precisely what **8** says. Of course, accounting for the truth of one thing by citing a truth from which it follows is not yet to give an *ontological* accounting, to give the ontological grounds for it; we instead simply push the question back a step. What is it that makes **8** true?

For it to be wrong to kick dogs, two conditions must obtain. First, it must be warranted that it is wrong to kick dogs. Second, such warrant would have to survive in the

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<sup>34</sup>See Lynch 2009, chapter 8 for a defense of the idea that moral truth might amount to something like superassertibility and nothing more.

face of arbitrarily large improvements of our epistemic state. I admit that I find it baffling how to evaluate these conditions in the present context. Truth is being understood in terms of warrant and improvement of our information. Hence, in understanding what the nature of warrant is here, or what it is to improve our state of information, we cannot, on pain of circularity, be relying on some prior notion of truth. But I have no grasp of what it is for some statement to be warranted independently of the notion of truth. And so I have no grasp of what it is that could make **8** true.

Let us delve into this argument a bit more deeply. We are supposing that **5** is true: it is wrong to kick dogs. Now, we of course can uphold this biconditional:

(9) 'It is wrong to kick dogs' is true if and only if it is wrong to kick dogs.

As **9** makes explicit, the truth of **5** amounts to no more than the wrongness of kicking dogs. There is no more to the *truth* of 'It is wrong to kick dogs' than there is to the *wrongness* of kicking dogs. This is the deflationist's key insight, and the one we exploited in section 3.3. But Wright's assimilation of moral truth to superassertibility shows that the truth of **5** amounts to no more than the truth of **8**. Hence, the wrongness of kicking dogs amounts to no more than what is given in **8**. **8** offers an account of *what it is for kicking dogs to be wrong*. So what is it for kicking dogs to be wrong? There are two conditions. Kicking dogs is wrong only if we are warranted in believing that kicking dogs is wrong. And kicking dogs is wrong only if that warrant would survive an arbitrary increase in our amount of information. I happen to think that this is a most implausible account of what it is for it to be wrong to kick dogs, but let us not beg the question too early.<sup>35</sup> What is it for the first condition to obtain?

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<sup>35</sup>Indeed, I am inclined to call this view (and all other epistemically constrained notions of truth) a non-starter. Note that in this presentation of the argument I have deliberately disquoted 'truth' away. Doing so brings out much more explicitly the (what I find to be) deeply implausible nature of the view. (Musgrave refers to

We need an account of warrant for believing that kicking dogs is wrong that has nothing to do with the wrongness of kicking dogs. After all, the *wrongness itself is constituted in part by our warrant for believing in it.*

The natural thing to say here (and I think the correct thing to say here) is that our warrant for believing that kicking dogs is wrong is constituted by our evidence and reason for thinking that kicking dogs is wrong. But that answer already takes for granted the notion of the wrongness of kicking dogs, which is precisely what we're trying to understand. On the correct view of things, we have warrant when we are on track toward the truth: warrant is understood in terms of truth. On the superassertibilist view of things, truth consists in part in being warranted: truth is understood in terms of warrant. It strikes me that the superassertibilist gets the order of explanation exactly backwards. In any event, we are owed an account of what warrant for believing in the wrongness of kicking dogs is such that it is completely independent of the wrongness of kicking dogs. I fail to be able to anticipate what such an account may be.<sup>36</sup>

I have no good answer, then, for what could serve as the basis for my warrant in believing that kicking dogs is wrong (since that warrant cannot consist in my having evidence that points in favor of the wrongness of kicking dogs). Turn now to the second condition. It is wrong to kick dogs only if our warrant in believing in such wrongness would survive any arbitrary increase in information. Here we run into a counterfactual yet again.

The problem for understanding the second condition is just a compounding of the first.

Warrant shows up again (and it remains mysterious what that consists in), but this time with

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epistemic theories of truth as a “fandango” that are “one of the least edifying sights in philosophy” (1989: 390). Those are his words, not mine, but I appreciate the sentiment.)

<sup>36</sup>Perhaps the answer has to do with what my social cohorts do. When I affirm **5** they give me high-fives, and when I deny it they hiss at me. I take it that anyone with an epistemic conscience does not think that these are good reasons for belief.

modal features. Here I just echo what came before. If we cannot say what warrant is, we cannot say what it is for warrant to remain under various counterfactual circumstances. So even if **8** is true, it provides no insight into what could make it true. Truthmaker theorists are interested in the ontological inventory that accompanies our store of truths. Their ontological inquiries concerning some truth are not satiated by being passed on, customer service style, to some other truth. The truths need to bottom out in the world, and the now pervasive retreat to counterfactuals serves only to obscure the questions of ontological accountability that are at the heart of the truthmaking literature.<sup>37</sup>

#### 5.2.7. Quasi-realism

Let us turn now to the elusive camp of quasi-realism. We met this view in section 4.3.3, where we exploited it in giving an account of projectivist truthmaking, and so the stage has already been set for most of our discussion of the view. Like Wright, quasi-realists seek to make out a place for moral truth that is firmly entrenched in an anti-realist understanding of ethical thought. The most prominent defenders of quasi-realism are Blackburn (e.g., 1984b, 1998) and Gibbard (1990, 2003). I shall focus on Blackburn's work, since he is the program's inventor<sup>38</sup> and standard-bearer. The quasi-realist is one who, starting from a generally anti-realist perspective, comes to mimic the perspective of realism while still maintaining anti-realism (Blackburn 1980: 353). The quasi-realist "earns the right" to views typically associated with realism by allowing himself only those resources available to the anti-realist. The *prima facie* challenge for the quasi-realist is to show that he has legitimately

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<sup>37</sup>Perhaps the answer for Wright (and the constructivist as well) when it comes to the counterfactuals is to take them as non-discriminating truthmaker gaps (i.e., as brute truths). Such appeals to brute counterfactual facts fall foul of good truthmaker theory, and good ethical thought as well. We shall take up this response below.

<sup>38</sup>The name, at least, is due to Blackburn. Blackburn would no doubt honor Hume with inventing the program.

earned the right to realist doctrines in a way that both does not compromise his anti-realism and also offers a recognizable difference from realism. The view certainly can give the appearance of possessing all the benefits of theft over honest toil; the trick to defending quasi-realism is to dispel such appearances.

Quasi-realism has developed and morphed over the years, precisely over some of the points most crucial to our interest in the project. For example, Blackburn at times used to describe his projectivism as an “as if” philosophy:

According to projectivism we speak and think ‘as if’ the world contained a certain kind of fact, whereas the true explanation of what we are doing is that we have certain reactions, habits or sentiments, which we voice and discuss by such talk. (1984a: 284)

In later years, the ‘as if’ portion of the view disappears completely. Faced with the question of whether quasi-realism is an ‘as if’ philosophy, Blackburn now bluntly replies: “No, no, no” (1998: 319). The as-if approach squares with the general goal of quasi-realism, which is to earn realist doctrines (we are entitled to speak as if there are things such as objective moral truths) without compromising anti-realism (but really there are no such things). It is easy to see, then, why no less than Lewis (2005) has classified quasi-realism as a kind of fictionalism. (Blackburn 2005 adamantly resists the parallel.) But since quasi-realism is not the as-if view, it must accomplish its task by other means.

The quasi-realist takes his cue instead from Hume’s projectivism about causation: “The central thought is that dignifying a relationship between events as causal is spreading or projecting a reaction which we have to something else we are aware of about the events” (Blackburn 1984b: 210). The causal relation is not something that we detect and describe, accurately or not, in nature; rather, it is something that our minds project onto the world. It is tempting to describe the projectivist view as holding that, as a result of our “spreading” the

projected properties onto the world ourselves, they in fact aren't really there. The task of quasi-realism is to justify why projectivism is after all entitled to realist-sounding claims like 'Causality is real' and 'That event would have caused that other event even if no one had judged it so'.<sup>39</sup> Blackburn is thus an *expressivist* because he takes moral judgments to be expressive of certain kinds of attitudes rather than descriptive of some portion of reality, a *projectivist* because, following Hume, he takes moral properties to be projections onto the world by our moral practices, and finally a *quasi-realist* because he defends his projectivist expressivism's right to typically realism-indicative claims.<sup>40</sup>

Blackburn's view shares much in common with the early non-cognitivists that we toured earlier. Moral judgments do not aim at describing reality; rather, they aim to express certain kinds of attitudes. Because we need not posit any independent moral reality for moral judgments to describe, quasi-realists can offer an account of moral practice on slim metaphysical grounds. Here is Blackburn: "So the expressivist thinks we can say interestingly what is involved for a subject *S* to think that *X* is good. It is for *S* to value it, and this can be explained in natural terms" (1998: 50).<sup>41</sup> It is important to realize that even though moral judgments express our moral values, we do not describe ourselves as having those values when we make moral judgments. Moral judgments express our values; they don't describe them. Hence, the following judgments of *S*'s are distinct:

(10) *X* is good.

(11) I value *X*.

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<sup>39</sup>Blackburn nicely distinguishes projectivism from quasi-realism at his 1984b: 180. There he describes Mackie as a projectivist, but not a quasi-realist.

<sup>40</sup>In general, I shall refer to the quasi-realist as the one who, like Blackburn, endorses this tripartite view.

<sup>41</sup>What is it to value something? Here is Blackburn's answer: "To hold a value, then, is typically to have a relatively stable disposition to conduct practical life and practical discussion in a particular way: it is to be disposed or *set* in that way, and notably to be set against change in this respect" (1998: 67).

When *S* utters **10** sincerely, she expresses her valuing of *X*, and so she cannot sincerely utter **10** unless **11** is true. Even if *X* weren't good, it may still be the case that *S* values it. So **10** and **11**, even in the mouth of *S*, are logically distinct. Further, if *S* is entitled to assert **10** (which she is if **11** is true), then she is entitled to assert

(12) It is true that *X* is good.

Blackburn would say that what entitles the quasi-realist to the jump from **10** to **12** is his acceptance of the deflationary theory of truth. Embracing such a theory is certainly sufficient to justify the inference, but is far from necessary. What is necessary is that the quasi-realist speak English. As Ramsey (1927) pointed out early on about 'is true' (and as Frege (1956) and Wittgenstein (1953) both observed about '*ist wahr*'), we can move freely between the assertion that *p* and the assertion that *p* is true. Nothing is gained or lost when moving from side to side across a T-sentence. That's just a fact about English, and recognizable by anyone who has mastered 'is true' (and 'it is true that', 'it is a fact that', etc.). The important point is that even the expressivist may make the inference between **10** and **12**. So if *S* is prepared to assert that *X* is good, she should be equally prepared to assert that '*X* is good' is true, that it is a matter of fact that *X* is good, and that God, supposing he exists and is omniscient, believes that *X* is good. Expressivists have as much right to the truth predicate and its cognates as anyone else.

What I find most curious about the quasi-realist program is its near exclusive attention to the psychology of moral judgment, and not its metaphysics. Of course, quasi-realists attempt to defend their metaethical views on metaphysically austere grounds; but an austere metaphysics is a metaphysics nonetheless. The anti-realist is a brother metaphysician. My worry is that by keeping silent on certain questions, quasi-realism hides some of its

(potentially but not necessarily problematic) metaphysical features. We have already seen one such passage a moment ago: the quasi-realist offers an account of “what is involved for a subject *S* to *think* that *X* is good” (Blackburn 1998: 50; emphasis added). Here is a sampling of more of the kinds of passages I have in mind:

The sentence ‘*a* is good’ is indeed true, in English, if and only if *a* is good. That is, if and only if we are committed to the goodness of *a* *will we allow that the English sentence is true*. That is its rule of use. But saying this tells us nothing about the kind of commitment it is: it is quite irrelevant to the metaphysics. (Blackburn 1981: 180; emphasis added)

If quasi-realism is successful, a projectivist *has the right to think of moral judgments as true or false*, as reasonable or unreasonable, and so on. (Blackburn 1981: 185; emphasis added)

if we sympathize with the pressures I have described, we come to appreciate why it should be natural to treat expressions of attitude as if they were similar to ordinary judgements. We come to need a predicate, whose behaviour is like that of others. Why not regard ourselves as having *constructed* a notion of moral truth? If we have done so, then *we can happily say* that moral judgements are true or false, only not think that we have sold out to realism when we do so. (Blackburn 1984b: 196; latter emphasis added)

To *allow* that a moral judgement is true is to *endorse the attitude* it expresses. (Blackburn 2002a: 134; emphasis added)

If I can explain normative language in such a way that a minimal notion of truth applies to normative claims as I explain them, *I can happily call many such claims true*. (Gibbard 2003: 63; emphasis added)

Suppose instead that minimalists are right for truth, for facts, and for belief: there is no more to claiming “It’s true that pain is bad” than to claim that pain is bad; the fact that pain is bad just consists in pain’s being bad; to believe that pain is bad is just to accept that it is. Then it’s true that pain is bad and it’s a fact that pain is bad—so long as, indeed, pain is bad. I genuinely believe that pain is bad, and my expressivistic theory, filled out, *explains what believing this consists in*. (Gibbard 2003: 182-183; emphasis added)

What I mean to call attention to in my selective italicization is the quasi-realist focus on *what we’re doing* when we make moral judgments, and what we will *allow* and *say* about certain moral judgments, and what *rights* or *entitlements* we have to make such claims. I am raising

no objection by pointing out the quasi-realist attention to such matters. My point is merely to highlight the kinds of questions for which quasi-realism provides an answer, so as to bring into focus another question about which it seems at times to be absolutely (and needlessly willfully) silent.

The kind of contrast I have in mind can be seen by once again turning to Hume on causation.<sup>42</sup> Hume's exploration into causality provides us with an account of what it is that we're up to when we make judgments of causality. When I judge that C caused E, what exactly is the idea I have in my mind when I make such a judgment? Hume adroitly shows how, within the framework of his theory of ideas, he can offer a satisfying naturalistic account of what it is to judge that C causes E. When I make some such judgment, I do not have before my mind an idea of some mysterious power or necessary connection which is traceable to no impression. Instead, I have before my mind a constant conjunction of events paired with a certain extra push from my mind that moves me from thoughts of C to thoughts of E. If you, to the contrary, do not judge that C caused E, Hume can explain why: your mind has not supplied the extra kick that would move you to infer E from C.

Let us accept all of this so far. We have an adequate account of *what it is to make a judgment of causality*. We have an answer to the question: What am I up to when I judge that C causes E? But here is another question: What is it for C to cause E? Furthermore, did C in fact cause E? The distinction can be put quite bluntly. Hume may well tell me what I'm thinking when I judge that C causes E. But I also want to know whether I'm right, whether

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<sup>42</sup>See section 7 of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* or section 1.3.14 of his *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

my judgment is true.<sup>43</sup> C does not cause E simply because I judge that it does. The canons of good causal reasoning say just as much. If we think we have a legitimate separation of inquiries here (and perhaps Hume himself would deny this), we are forced to conclude that while Hume offers an account of the former, the latter questions remain unanswered.<sup>44</sup>

My worry about quasi-realism is that while it may well give us the right to treat moral discourse in cognitivist fashion, and happily explain what we're doing when we engage in moral discourse, it does nothing to address the issue of whether what we're doing is correct. We have not yet, in other words, separated projectivism from error theory. Of course, once we recognize the equivalence between 'X is wrong' and 'It is true that X is wrong', we can apply the projectivist analysis offered for the former equally well to the latter. In the above passages, Gibbard is stressing just this point, and it is something about which I have absolutely no reservations. Anyone prepared to make one of the claims had better be prepared, on pain of inconsistency, to make the other. We should expect as much from any cognitivist metaethical theory (where I take 'cognitivism' just to indicate truth-aptness, and the kind of view that avoids the Frege-Geach problem).

But notice that all the quasi-realist has earned so far is cognitivism. Moral judgments, just like any other kind of judgment, are either true or false. The quasi-realist has a perfectly

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<sup>43</sup>This sentence is a perfect example of a stylistic reason to keep 'is true' around. My question of whether it's true that C caused E is exactly the same question as whether C caused E. But even though the two ways of formulating the question are equivalent, asking it in the way I did makes the import and intent of the question more perspicuous. Yet my experience has been that when I ask such questions utilizing the abbreviatory and anaphoric functions of 'is true', people often take me to be asking a more "philosophical" question (that perhaps brings in the baggage of objectivity and all that) than if I had not made the semantic ascent, as if by doing so I had (impossibly) climbed higher up Ramsey's ladder. But asking after the truth of the matter at hand here is no more or less metaphysically loaded than is asking whether C caused E. So my question in no way presupposes a metaphysically robust conception of truth, such that the question would dissolve were we to take on deflationism.

<sup>44</sup>I note in passing the familiar observation that the British empiricists, stuck as they are behind the veil of ideas, in general have a difficult time accounting for how a belief can be true. I admit that this is a theoretical demand of my own that they might not necessarily recognize.

good story of how, on projectivist grounds, we can *speak of* the truth or falsity of moral judgments (and, in turn, moral facts, moral reality, etc.).<sup>45</sup> What is in danger of being left out is how it can be possible for ethical judgments to *be* true. Granted, we have the “right” to attribute truth to them, just as we have the “right” to say that it’s true that C caused E whenever I say that C caused E. The quasi-realist gives us a satisfying account, let us say, of what it is to judge that X is bad, or that X is good (and furthermore, of what it is to judge that it is true that X is bad, or that it is true that X is good). But what is it for X to be bad, or for X to be good? When are my moral judgments true, and when are they false? True, my judgment that X is bad is true just in case X is bad. No one is out to deny that. But what is it for X to *be* bad, on the projectivist story? That question seems to be of less interest to quasi-realists, but it is an important one that must be addressed for those interested in the metaphysical implications of ethical discourse.<sup>46</sup> The worry is that the subject has been changed on us. We want an account of why a certain moral judgment is true, not an account of why we are entitled to append ‘is true’ to the back of our moral commitments. We want to know what makes those commitments the correct ones.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Note that quasi-realists may not ignore the fact that there is a genuine metaphysical issue regarding the metaphysics of facts. Everyone who speaks English can admit that there is a sense of the word ‘fact’ that is synonymous with ‘truth’, such that ‘It’s a truth that snow is white’ and ‘It’s a fact that snow is white’ are synonymous. (I deliberately used that sense in the first occurrence of ‘fact’ in the first sentence of this footnote, but not in the second.) Granting that there is this sense, however, in no way erases the debate over whether there are such things as (the other kind of) facts (or Mellor’s *facta*, or Armstrong’s states of affairs). The quasi-realist, if successful, has earned the right to there being moral facts in the first, linguistic sense, just as anyone else has who has earned the right to speak of moral truth. But the quasi-realist has in no way earned any moral facts in the sense of Russell, Mellor, or Armstrong (nor should he want to). It is misleading to say, without disambiguation, that quasi-realists can agree with moral realists that there are moral facts. There is no more agreement here (if the realist adopts moral facts as entities) than there is when you and I “agree” that there are banks (while you’re thinking of the Danube and I’m thinking of Wall Street).

<sup>46</sup>Indeed, I think it is the worry held (consciously or not) by those who suspect that quasi-realism collapses into subjectivism. See Jackson and Pettit 1998, Bloomfield 2003, Shafer-Landau 2003, Suikkanen 2009, and Blackburn’s various responses (e.g., his 1999 and 2006).

<sup>47</sup>Blackburn seems intent at times to demean the value of my question: whether something *is* good strikes the expressivist as something that “is not the subject of this theoretical concern—that is, not the subject of concern

The worry here is perhaps most explicit in the first block quotation from Blackburn above. He first focuses our attention on this biconditional:

(13) ‘*a* is good’ is true if and only if *a* is good.

So far so good. But the ‘that is’ that immediately follows suggests that **13** is intended to be nothing more than a rephrasing of this (very different) biconditional:

(14) We allow that ‘*a* is good’ is true if and only if we are committed to the goodness of *a*.

**14**, I take it, is true, at least by the projectivist’s lights. Yet in no way is it equivalent to **13**. Blackburn’s point is that, for each of the biconditionals, what goes on the left is no different from what goes on the right. But if **13** and **14** are equivalent, then given the equivalence of each of the biconditionals’ two conditions, we can derive the following absurd (by the quasi-realist’s lights) biconditionals:

(15) ‘*a* is good’ is true if and only if we allow that ‘*a* is good’ is true.

(16) *a* is good if and only if we are committed to the goodness of *a*.

Fully exposed, **15** and **16** are biconditionals that only a subjectivist could accept.<sup>48</sup> **13** and **14** are both true, but in no way is **14** a restatement or elucidation of **13**. **13** is just a banal T-sentence. **14** follows from the projectivist’s account of what we’re up to when we make moral judgments. Our commitment to *a*’s goodness makes *sincere* our assertion that ‘*a* is good’ is true; hence **14**’s two conditions go together. But our commitment to *a*’s goodness does not make *true* the assertion that ‘*a* is good’ is true, and so **16** is (indicatively) false. My worry about quasi-realism is that it attends to sentences like **14**, which speak to the

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for those of us who, while naturalists, want a theory of ethics” (1998: 50). It’s unclear, though, that Blackburn believes this. As we shall see, he goes on to tell us what makes certain things good or bad.

<sup>48</sup>At least, on their most natural (indicative) reading they are false. Of course, they could very well be true read materially. In any event, what is important is that **15** and **16** are not necessarily true as **13** and **14** are (holding their conditions’ meanings fixed across possible worlds, of course).

psychology of moral judgment and what it is to make a moral judgment, and then assimilates that account to **13**, which is just about the truth of moral judgments. Think of it this way: That I gladly assent to both conditions of **14** in no way helps me determine whether the conditions of **13** are true. The truth of the conditions of **14** can come apart from the truth of the conditions of **13**, as any quasi-realist should be quick to point out.<sup>49</sup>

The impending challenge for quasi-realism here can be brought into better focus by viewing the case through the lens of truthmaker theory. The quasi-realist agrees with the error theorist that moral judgments are truth-apt. They diverge in that the quasi-realist thinks that there are moral truths. ‘Kicking dogs is wrong’ is true if and only if kicking dogs is wrong. Blackburn and Mackie both agree.<sup>50</sup> Blackburn assents to both the left-hand and right-hand conditions; Mackie denies both. The truthmaker theorist gives Mackie a pass—no truth, no need for a truthmaker. But we do need to pose the question to Blackburn: Given that it’s true, what, if anything, is the truthmaker for ‘Kicking dogs is wrong’?

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<sup>49</sup>Blackburn might respond by saying that he does take **13** and **14** to be equivalent, but only because he understands **14** differently than I do. I am taking the conditions of **14** on what I take to be their natural reading. ‘We are committed to the goodness of *a*’ is a statement about us and what our commitments are. Someone could assent to that sentence even if he disagreed with us about *a*’s supposed goodness (because he knows that we happen to value *a*). Blackburn might be taking ‘We are committed to the goodness of *a*’ not to be a statement about us at all, but instead as no more than a statement about the goodness of *a*, exactly equivalent to ‘*a* is good’ after all. I am taking my cue here from Blackburn 1998: 305, where he assimilates ‘Slavery is a bad system’ to ‘Our opinion is this: slavery is a bad system’. If this alternate reading is right, then Blackburn’s first-person plural sentences are highly misleading, and are helping to breed the confusion behind quasi-realism’s objectors charging the program with subjectivist consequences.

<sup>50</sup>Note that they agree even if they disagree on what the best theory of truth is. This entire section is a testament to how irrelevant the debate between correspondence and deflationism is to the topic of moral realism.

I suspect that Blackburn may want to reject the question.<sup>51, 52</sup> But what is it to reject a question? Is it to find it unintelligible? Is it to think it unimportant or irrelevant? Our question is perfectly intelligible; I have said what it is for a truth to have a truthmaker. Whether the question is important or irrelevant will be seen clearly after (but only after) we start to answer it. So I take it that rejection is not an option. What is an option is to deny that ‘Kicking dogs is wrong’ has a truthmaker. Truthmaker gaps are perfectly tolerable on our view. In that case, we can then ask whether it has metaphysical grounds at all, and then what relevance that ground (or lack thereof) has for moral realism and anti-realism. We can explore, in other words, whether the truth is metaphysically discriminating or not. If ‘Kicking dogs is wrong’ does have a truthmaker, then again we can ask what it is, and what implication that has for the realism debate.

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<sup>51</sup>My suspicion here is due to the opening pages of Blackburn 1986, where he contrasts his favored metaethical approach (the “quasi-realist alternative”) with the “truth-conditions” approach that he rejects. The language of truth-conditions here suggests some linguistic infiltration into a metaphysical issue. Indeed, part of the truth-conditions approach involves asking the question “of what it is that *makes* [moral judgments] true” (119). Once again, I urge that we resist any temptation to conflate truth-conditions with truthmakers. See also Blackburn 2009: 207, the tone of which suggests that Blackburn would be unsympathetic to our investigations here. But note that Blackburn suggests that we may still “ruminate over what it is *in virtue of which* happiness is good, and deploy our standards and values to pursue this ethical question” (ibid.). But asking in virtue of what it is that happiness is good *just is* asking what it is in virtue of which ‘Happiness is good’ is true, which just is asking what the truthmaker is for ‘Happiness is good’. That Blackburn can sweep away metaphysical questions with one hand, only to draw them back with the other suggests that he is reading too much inflationary metaphysics into our present investigation.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Horgan and Timmons: “On our view and on expressivist views generally, moral judgments are not in the business of describing or representing the world—they are not to be understood as way-the-world-might-be judgments. So, metaphysically speaking, there is nothing to say about what *makes* a moral judgment true or false, where the expectation is to specify some substantive truth (and falsity)-makers for moral judgments” (2006b: 88, footnote 17). First, note the assumption that only judgments that represent the world require truthmakers. Note also the assumption that there is a distinction between judgments that represent and those that don’t. Finally, note the suggestion that moral judgments require no truthmakers. All of these claims I am happy to reject. The first assumption is not argued for, and disappears altogether once we reject the second assumption (on grounds of semantic deflationism—see the discussion of creeping minimalism below in section 5.3). The third, as we shall see, is actually out of spirit with expressivism, given that it essentially rejects the lesson of the supervenience argument Blackburn offers in favor of expressivism (1971, 1985b). We also tackle this argument below, in section 5.4. It is clear from their essay that Horgan and Timmons are running together the idea of a substantive theory of truth with the idea of a substantive theory of truthmakers. We shall see below what consequences befall those who argue that moral truths do not have truthmakers.

It has long been asked of quasi-realism whether it is a genuinely anti-realist view, or whether it is merely a “queasy” form of realism.<sup>53</sup> The truthmaker theorist predicts that, since realism debates are at bottom debates over truthmakers, if quasi-realism is the anti-realist view it proclaims itself to be, then its anti-realism will be made apparent by a careful investigation into how it responds to our series of truthmaking questions. As should be obvious from the previous chapter, I think we can use truthmaker theory to articulate precisely where quasi-realism diverges from moral realism.

What is very clear on the quasi-realist view is what moral truthmakers are *not*. First, they are not *sui generis* non-naturalistic moral facts (in the metaphysical sense), for they believe that there are no such things (Blackburn 1986: 124). Nor does the quasi-realist accept naturalistic facts as truthmakers in the way that naturalistic realists do. When addressing “Cornell realism”—the naturalistic approach to moral realism that identifies moral properties with natural ones—Blackburn writes: “Cornell realism thinks we can identify the ‘truthmakers’ for our ethical thoughts, identifying what properties of things make them true, rather as the scientist identifies the property of stuff that identifies water or gold” (1998: 87-88). As before, I take the punch line of this story to be that Blackburn does not think that there is any sort of ontological dependence that holds between natural facts and moral truths (even though he can think that the natural facts make moral judgments true in a different, projectivist, sense).

It is of paramount importance to the defenders of quasi-realism that they make it clear that the moral truthmakers cannot be the attitudes themselves that are expressed by moral

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<sup>53</sup>E.g., Dworkin 1996 and Rosen 1998. For further discussion see McDowell 1985, Wright 1988b, Blackburn 1993d, Kit Fine 2001, Devitt 2002b, Gibbard 2003: 184-188, and Dreier 2004.

judgments, crucial though they are to understanding the projectivist view. Suppose I deeply value philanthropy. Then when I utter

(17) Philanthropy is good

I do so *sincerely*. But it does not follow that I thereby judge *truly*. It does follow that if I were to utter

(18) It is true that philanthropy is good

I would thereby do so sincerely. But it would not follow that my utterance of **18** would be true. The truth of **17** and **18** stand and fall together, for sure, as does their sincerity. But my valuing of philanthropy guarantees only that my utterances are sincere, not that they are true. To think that the attitudes and values are themselves the moral truthmakers would be to endorse a kind of subjectivism: what makes it true that philanthropy is good is just that I value it.<sup>54</sup> For suppose that I also dearly value kicking dogs. Then my utterance of

(19) Kicking dogs is good

is sincere, but hardly true (even though I would sincerely (and incorrectly) judge that it's true that kicking dogs is good). Blackburn is explicit in his acknowledgement of this point: "Like anyone else [the projectivist] thinks that what makes it wrong to kick dogs is that it causes them pain" (1981: 179).<sup>55</sup> It is not the attitudes themselves that make things right or wrong,

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<sup>54</sup>See Blackburn 2006. Blackburn is fond of complaining that commentators often interpret his view, against his repeated protestations, as being committed to such subjectivism—see again footnote 46. I think such commentators are best interpreted as not understanding what else it could be that grounds the truth of moral judgments, given that they are in fact true on the quasi-realist's view (see Bloomfield 2003). Does nothing ground the truth of moral judgments? If so, then both their truth and falsity are equally grounded (i.e., not at all).

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Blackburn 1985a: "if everyone comes to think of it as permissible to maltreat animals, this does nothing at all to make it permissible: it just means that everybody has deteriorated" (14). See also Blackburn 1988: "It is because of our responses that we *say* that cruelty is wrong, but it is not because of them that it is so. [...O]ur actual responses are inappropriate for the wrongness of cruelty to depend upon. What makes cruelty abhorrent is not that it offends us, but all those hideous things that make it do so" (367). Interestingly, in a later reprint the middle sentence here gets changed to "[O]ur actual responses are inappropriate anchors for the wrongness of cruelty" (1993b: 172). The talk of "anchoring" here (and the original talk of dependence, as well as the repeated reference to "making") strongly suggests that Blackburn (despite his own efforts, perhaps) is thinking in terms

even though it is the attitudes that are expressed when we judge of things that they are right or wrong. The projectivist stresses that when we make a moral judgment, we *commit* ourselves rather than *describe* ourselves. Were I to utter

(20) I value philanthropy

I would do so truly and sincerely (supposing my self-reflective beliefs are correctly attuned). But **20** does not express what **17** expresses, even though **17** is sincere if and only if **20** is true. The biconditional we are lacking is the one between **17** and **20**. In other words, the biconditional

(21) I value philanthropy if and only if philanthropy is good

is not necessarily true (and indicatively false). Philanthropy would still be good even if I did not value it.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the projectivist avoids a distasteful subjectivism (where philanthropy's being good is solely dependent upon my valuing it), but at the cost of making our truthmaker question all the more difficult to answer. If **17** and **20** were equivalent, then we could transfer the (easily enough attained) truthmaker for **20** over to **17**. But the truth of **17** is independent from the truth of **20**. The sincerity of **17**, again, is dependent upon the truth of **20**. The *truth* of **17**, alas, is another matter.

We know how the quasi-realist should not answer our truthmaker query. How should he answer it? Here I make the case that quasi-realists can look to the natural world, so long as they rely on a projectivist account of the truthmaking relation. Recall that Blackburn writes that “what makes it wrong to kick dogs is that it causes them pain” (1981: 179). Here we can attend to the following fact:

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of truthmaking and ontological grounding, and that our attitudes are *not* playing that role when it comes to the truth of moral judgments.

<sup>56</sup>Hence quasi-realists disagree with constructivists about how to answer the Euthyphro question regarding the moral and the judgments of the ideal observer, and hence disagree about such counterfactuals. For concern over whether quasi-realists are actually entitled to this answer, see Rasmussen 1985.

(22) Kicking dogs causes them pain.

Suppose we offer an adequate truthmaker for **22**. The details will be difficult, of course; the presence of causality here forces us to inquire into what it is that makes causal judgments true. (And recall my suspicion that even if projectivists are right about what it is to make a causal judgment, they haven't yet said what it is that makes a causal judgment true.)

Whatever the best truthmaker account is that is available for **22**, we can at least notice that there is nothing distinctly ethical about **22**. **22** is of interest to philosophers of science and philosophers of mind; they are the ones to whom we should turn if we want a metaphysical account of the nature of causality and pain.<sup>57</sup> So let us suppose that they do have a truthmaker to offer us for **22**; let us call it 'K'. The existence of K guarantees the truth of **22**. Blackburn thinks that because **22** is true, so too is **23**:

(23) It is wrong to kick dogs.

The reason why it's wrong to kick dogs is that doing so causes them pain. If **23** follows<sup>58</sup> from **22**, then whatever makes true **22** (namely, K) is also a truthmaker for **23**. Presumably, K is a perfectly acceptable natural creature. It is no offense to naturalists, since **22** itself is no offense. It seems, then, that the quasi-realist does have the resources to give an account of what makes moral truths true. The quasi-realist may point in the same direction as the naturalistic realist. The quasi-realist's distinctive metaethical theses involve attitudes, values, and sentiments. Those are what get expressed by moral judgments. But it is clear that they do not make moral judgments true—though they play an important role in understanding how

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<sup>57</sup>Of course, we may also consult the relevant psychologists and scientists. I'm not advocating an entirely *a priori* approach to truthmaking. Those who accuse contemporary analytic metaphysicians of being confined to the armchair do so to their own ironic peril; a quick glance at the empirical facts of what metaphysicians are up to will reveal that they do not take metaphysical questions to be decided purely *a priori*.

<sup>58</sup>The nature of the consequence relation here is of course a matter of some controversy. We shall tackle the question when we get to the topic of moral supervenience.

truths and their truthmakers match up. Notice that for quasi-realists, to see what makes moral judgments true, we have to inquire individually into what makes things right or wrong. There is no single property like *goodness* that can be an across-the-board truthmaker for moral judgments. So, kicking dogs is wrong because it causes them pain. Cruelty is abhorrent because it causes suffering. On the quasi-realist view, moral truths are true because of certain naturalistic facts (they allow for no others).<sup>59</sup>

The quasi-realist I have presented can agree with the naturalist on what the moral truthmakers are. Again, this does not mean that the two views collapse into a single metaethical view. The reason why is that there is more to moral realism, and more to metaethics, than just what truthmakers there are. There is also the question of *how things get to be truthmakers*. Does K make it true that kicking dogs is wrong in virtue of its *de re* modal properties, or are we intimately involved via our sentiments and emotions? The quasi-realist distinguishes himself from the naturalist not in terms of what truthmakers there are, but in terms of the nature of the truthmaking relation, which must be understood in projectivist fashion when it comes to ethics.

In Blackburn's own critique of naturalistic moral realism, he contends that "no complete theory of ethics can simply point to the grounding properties, and suppose that evaluations are given their meaning by their relationship to them. We need first to understand

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<sup>59</sup>But see Blackburn 1984b, where attempts are made at giving a distinctive account of *moral* truth. Blackburn suggests there that we can "construct a notion of truth" such that a moral judgment is true just in case the attitude it expresses belongs to a "best possible set of attitudes" (198). If so, then what would make a moral judgment true is whatever it is that makes the attitude it expresses belong to the best possible set of attitudes; understanding this latter notion would then be paramount in understanding the metaphysics of quasi-realism. This particular strategy, however, has been abandoned. First, it seems to make quasi-realism just another version of constructivism, in which case it would inherit that view's truthmaking fumbles. Second, it is very much out of step with more deflationary accounts of truth, which Blackburn seems to endorse happily nowadays. Just as deflationists should make no use of distinct "senses" of truth, we should not think that there are multiple varieties of truth. There's nothing distinctive about *moral truth*, in contrast to *scientific truth*, say, such that theorists of truth have a multiplicity of distinct projects in which to engage. There are just moral truths, scientific truths, etc. Lynch, by contrast, has taken up the *Spreading the Word* approach in formulating a distinctively moral kind of truth (2009).

the evaluative stance” (1998: 69). Blackburn’s point against the Cornell realist is well taken. Suppose that the Cornell realist gets the truthmaker story about moral judgments correct. Does it follow that every metaethical question has been answered? Surely not. Now, we have so far suggested that **22** and **23** share the same truthmaker(s). But in no way should we claim that **22** and **23** share the same *meaning*.<sup>60</sup> The threat of Moore’s open question argument looms large when naturalistic reductions or identifications are afoot. The Cornell realist goes so far as to identify moral properties with certain naturalistic ones. Blackburn’s view seems to be that this identification of properties is mostly beside the point when it comes to understanding ethical thought. “I find this approach puzzling, because it is unclear what problems it solves,” Blackburn writes about the Cornell school (1993a: 180). One does not understand ethics any better, one can imagine Blackburn saying, by discovering the *de re* features of the natural world.

If the foregoing is correct, then quasi-realists should not say that ethical truths come with no metaphysical commitments whatsoever. Eschewing realist metaphysics is not tantamount to eschewing metaphysics altogether. Ethical truths are still true in virtue of something or other. We now have the materials to address one of the most contentious questions surrounding quasi-realism. Is it really a version of anti-realism, or is it just moral realism again in different dress? We now know the answer. Quasi-realism is a form of anti-realism, because though it takes there to be moral truths grounded in a realism-relevant

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<sup>60</sup>Note, however, that a fair question for the quasi-realist is this: If **22** and **23** do not mean the same thing, then why are they made true by the same thing(s)? Of course, metaphysical issues are not semantic ones; truthmaker theorists are the first to point that out. One may still wonder, however, why there should be metaphysical coincidence when not semantic coincidence. Another difficult question for the quasi-realist is how he answers the competing claims of those who say that a different set of naturalistic facts and properties are the truthmakers for moral truths. The Cornell realists can tie their truthmakers to their moral truths by means of their sophisticated semantic machinery. But on what grounds may Blackburn claim that **22** is the natural fact relevant to the truth of **23**? My thanks to Ben Herscovitch and Matthew Hammerton for helping me to appreciate these standing challenges for quasi-realism. (But note that I shall later be spinning this “challenge” for quasi-realism as a potential advantage.)

ontology (i.e., the natural world), it takes the relationship between moral truth and their truthmakers to be a mind-dependent, projectivist matter.

### 5.3. Creeping minimalism

#### 5.3.1. The problem

We have now completed a long (and still not fully comprehensive) tour of the metaethical terrain.<sup>61</sup> We have discussed a number of the prominent views, and seen how those views interact with the kinds of questions that are pertinent to truthmaker theory. My overall hypothesis is that questions about moral realism are at bottom question about truthmakers. What is at stake between moral realists and moral anti-realists is not over whether moral judgments are true, but what it is (if anything) that makes them true, and how those things get to be truthmakers. The truthmaker theory approach to realism thus has an account of moral realism to offer to metaethicists. If so, then we should be able to solve the problem of creeping minimalism, which purports to undermine the very debate by collapsing the distinctions between the various metaethical positions.

The problem of creeping minimalism comes to the fore when we recognize the potential strength of the quasi-realist program, and just how peculiar its standard is for success. The quasi-realist seeks to mimic the intellectual practices and views of his realist opponent. The more successful the quasi-realist program is, the more quasi-realism resembles realism. So the stronger the case is for quasi-realism, the more difficult the case is for distinguishing it from realism. The problem of creeping minimalism appears when views

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<sup>61</sup>For example, we have not discussed the secondary property view of McDowell (1981, 1985) and David Wiggins (1976). Nor have we discussed the ethical contextualism of Timmons (1999), or moral fictionalism (e.g., Joyce 2001 and Kalderon 2005). Richard Joyce has the same account of moral truthmakers as does Mackie—there are none—though Mark Eli Kalderon’s view is somewhat different.

like the deflationary theory of truth enter the scene. Once we acknowledge the merits of deflationary or minimal views on truth, we are led to acknowledge the merits of minimal approaches to other related notions such as propositions, reference, belief, and facts. In so doing, we begin to embrace everything that the realist originally embraced, and lose any grasp on just what was supposed to be at issue.<sup>62</sup>

Dreier describes the phenomenon of creeping minimalism as follows:

Minimalism sucks the substance out of heavy-duty metaphysical concepts. If successful, it can help Expressivism recapture the ordinary realist language of ethics. But in so doing it also threatens to make irrealism indistinguishable from realism. That is the problem of Creeping Minimalism. (2004: 26)<sup>63</sup>

If truth is not a substantive property of propositions, then all it is for the proposition, say, that torture is wrong to be true is just for torture to be wrong. So much for the supposedly difficult question of whether truth consists in conformity with reality, useful belief, or systematic coherence. But what is a proposition? The minimalist about propositions says that just as ‘is true’ is a handy appendage we can add to sentences, so too may I tack ‘the proposition that’ onto some sentence, thereby creating a singular term useful for other purposes. Since I can meaningfully discuss whether torture is wrong, I can just as easily meaningfully discuss whether the proposition that torture is wrong is true. But (it is claimed),

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<sup>62</sup>The historical precursor to the discussion of creeping minimalism was the question over whether metaethical expressivists could or should embrace some sort of deflationary theory of truth (and so possibly avoid the problems introduced by the Frege-Geach problem). That little literature is hard going. Dreier (1996) thinks that deflationism is no help here in solving the problem. If ‘expressivism’ picks out a view committed to moral judgments not being apt for truth, then Smith (1994a and 1994c) thinks expressivists ought to adopt deflationism (ditto for Jackson, Oppy, and Smith 1994), whereas Wright (1992), Horwich (1993 and 1994), and John Divers and Alexander Miller (1994 and 1995) think deflationism undermines the view that moral judgments are not truth-apt. Here I side with the latter camp. Deflationism about truth motivates deflationism about truth-aptness, and thus does away with expressivism in Smith’s sense. Boghossian (1990) argues for a tension between deflationism and any kind of non-factualism. Finally, O’Leary-Hawthorne and Huw Price (1996) argue that expressivism (at least when understood more perspicuously) can be maintained in spite of granting truth-aptness to ethical discourse, a conclusion with which I (along with Horwich 1990 and all contemporary quasi-realists) agree. See Bar-On and Chrisman 2009 for an explicit defense of such a view.

<sup>63</sup>See also Zangwill 1992, which anticipates the same problem.

I do not here engage in any extra ontological commitment to strange and mysterious entities called “propositions”.<sup>64</sup> A minimalist about facts just says that it’s a fact that torture is wrong just in case torture is wrong. Torture is wrong, and so there are ethical facts. Facts, minimally understood, are just true propositions, which in turn are just true sentences. Next, do I sincerely assert that torture is wrong? Yes, and so I believe that torture is wrong (so says the minimalist about belief).<sup>65</sup> We can even do the same for properties. Properties, minimally understood, are little more than predicates. If torture is wrong, then there is a moral property: wrongness. Very quickly, we see that ethical propositions, truths, facts, properties, and beliefs are very easily earned by the minimalist. But such things, in Dreier’s “Good Old Days”, were the cruxes that kept realists and anti-realists separate. Emotivists denied that there were ethical propositions (and hence none of the rest, either). Error theorists admitted ethical propositions, but denied that there were ethical properties, truths, or facts. Contemporary ethical expressivists (or certain time slices of them) allow ethical truths, but deny that our assertions of them express our beliefs. Once we open the minimalist floodgate, we appear to lose sight of what distinguishes realists from anti-realists. For the minimalist is entitled to say that there are moral truths, moral facts, moral propositions, and moral beliefs. Given that deflationism is now a solid plank in the quasi-realist platform (as in Blackburn 1998), one wonders if quasi-realism has become *too* successful: in attempting to mimic realism, it has just become realism.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>But see Hofweber 2005b for more thoroughgoing discussion of some of the issues in the neighborhood here.

<sup>65</sup>Gibbard explicitly endorses such a view of beliefs at his 2003: 182-183, as do Horgan and Timmons (2006b: 93).

<sup>66</sup>This seems to be Rosen’s conclusion (1998: 400). Dunaway 2010 argues that, contrary to Dreier, there is no minimalist theory that expressivists may accept that allows them to accept all of the realist’s claims.

In deference both to ordinary ethical practice—which the parties to the debate seem to agree manifests the surface trappings of realism—and to objections in the wake of the writings of P. T. Geach (1960, 1965), contemporary ethical anti-realists have sought to maintain that they too may earn the appearances of realist-sounding ethical discourse. The trick to doing so seems to be embracing minimalism about the key notions. To save the ethical phenomena, then, anti-realists turn to minimalism. But in so doing, they appear to turn into realists. (For why shouldn't realists be equally entitled to semantic minimalism?) The more the quasi-realism program is successful (such that it better and better can reclaim the claims of realism), the less it remains a distinctive view. The problem of creeping minimalism threatens to undermine a distinction at the very center of metaethical thought. As Dreier puts it: “those of us who feel confident that there is some difference between the two meta-ethical camps should be concerned that we don't know how to say what that difference is” (2004: 31).

There is one option, albeit it a highly unattractive one, that a theorist might take for drawing the difference. That option is to bifurcate each of the various notions. Truth is one thing; TRUTH is another. Some sentences express propositions; others express PROPOSITIONS. I have lots of beliefs; only some of these are BELIEFS. The lowercase notions are the minimalist versions, whereas the uppercase notions are the non-minimalist versions. The distinction between the quasi-realist and the realist can now be drawn. The quasi-realist thinks that we can have moral beliefs that, when true, express true moral propositions. By contrast, the realist thinks that we can have moral BELIEFS that, when TRUE, express TRUE moral PROPOSITIONS. Now, I am not terribly sympathetic toward classical non-cognitivism in general, but I heartily endorse a robust non-cognitivism about

capitalization. The sentence ‘It is true that snow is white’ conveys the exact same content as does ‘It is True that snow is white’ and ‘It is TRUE that snow is white’. If there is any difference to be found, it is in the former’s sole conformity to proper English grammar. Just how the distinction between “Capital ‘T’ Truth” and truth is supposed to be drawn has always escaped me.<sup>67</sup> That anyone should take a distinction in capitalization to bear some heavy philosophical load baffles me even more. Yet many have apparently taken refuge in it. *Arthur Fine* (1986) makes use of the notion of the “*World*” (utilizing *both* italics and capitalization!) to stigmatize certain (supposedly) opposing views.<sup>68</sup> *Kit Fine* (2001) distinguishes reality from Reality.<sup>69</sup> Now, of course these philosophers do not think that *merely* capitalizing a word adds cognitive content to it. They are using the syntactical distinction to mark a difference between what they take to be substantively different metaphysical positions. It’s easy to see why one might be attracted to drawing such a fine distinction,<sup>70</sup> and there seems to be a corresponding distinction in the popular vernacular (as in the distinction between truth and “capital T” truth). However, I think this bifurcated strategy is a dead end, or at least serves to trivialize a substantive metaethical issue. (I take it that Dreier takes his paper to reduce such views to absurdity, even if not to contradiction!)

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<sup>67</sup>Though I suppose it may have its root, as do many philosophical confusions, in a conflation of metaphysics and epistemology. Perhaps the capital ‘T’ truths are thought to be those with a privileged epistemic status. Or perhaps the capitalization is thought to convey modal status: truths are contingent, whereas Truths or TRUTHS are necessary. In any event, if there is a distinction to be drawn, doing so with capitalization (or italicization, or foot stomps, or other non-cognitive devices) is never illuminating. See James 1981:104 and 110 for a sample of what not to do.

<sup>68</sup>See Musgrave 1989 for a clever and insightful response to such moves of Fine’s. Cf. Putnam 1978 and its use of ‘THE WORLD’. We take up these views in full detail in the next chapter.

<sup>69</sup>See also Timmons 1999, which is particularly guilty in unapologetically employing a similar strategy. See Horwich 2007 for a critique of Fine’s program, and Fine 2007 for response. Putnam (in, e.g., his 1988) also makes use of a distinction between ‘realism’ and ‘Realism’.

<sup>70</sup>Here the pun was intended.

So what is the difference? Dreier considers three answers (drawing from O’Leary-Hawthorne and Price 1996, Kit Fine 2001, and Gibbard 2003) and adopts a hybridization of the proffered accounts that he calls “the “explanation” explanation” (2004: 39). The idea is that what distinguishes realists from anti-realists is how they go about explaining the existence of our moral beliefs. Suppose that Obama believes that torture is wrong. Then the following is true:

(24) Obama believes that torture is wrong.

Realists and anti-realists can agree that ‘Torture is wrong’ expresses a true moral proposition (i.e., a moral fact), and that Obama really does believe it. The difference comes in how they explain the truth of **24**. The realist must somehow explain **24** by demonstrating there to be some relationship between Obama, torture, and wrongness. The anti-realist does so without resorting to wrongness. Gibbard, for example, would say that the truth of **24** is explained by the planning state that Obama is in that has resulted in Obama’s thinking that the thing to do is not to torture. Wrongness gets left out of the anti-realist’s explanation, even though his minimalism about properties leads him to agree with the realist that there is a property of wrongness. (After all, torture is one thing that has the property.)

Here is how Dreier summarizes his response to the problem:

Crucial to maintaining the distinction, in meta-ethics, in the twenty-first century, between realism and irrealism is the possibility that concepts (and meanings) can differ in ways other than by their content. Or, if the difference between normative (or evaluative, or “planning”) concepts and descriptive (naturalistic) ones can also be stated as a difference in content, then at least it must be a comprehensible, substantive question whether the difference in concept is explained by (or if you prefer amounts to no more than) a difference in content, on the one hand, or rather it is explained by (amounts to) something else entirely, which in turn explains the difference in content. The divide between realism and irrealism, at least in meta-ethics, rests on the substance of questions about metaphysical explanation. (2004: 42)

The waters here are somewhat murky, but let us try to understand what is at stake in Dreier's response. The realist and anti-realist need not disagree as to the *content* of **24**. When they both maintain its truth, they are agreeing on the exact same claim. If they do disagree as to the content of such claims, then that difference must admit of some realism-relevant metaphysical explanation. I agree wholeheartedly, in some sense or other, with Dreier's claim that the divide between realism and anti-realism is a question about metaphysical explanation (though, as above, I have my reservations about wielding 'explanation' too incautiously). After all, we are understanding truthmaker theory as being in the business of offering metaphysical accountability. Still, I worry that the explanation explanation might not cut it. We have already seen what should long ago have been accepted as a Moorean fact in philosophy, namely, that requests for explanations are deeply sensitive to context and pragmatic interests. For any given datum—such as the truth of **24**—there are several explanatory demands that may be asked of it. It is hopelessly simple to think that there is some privileged explanation of something like **24**. Because of the plurality of explanatory requests that may be raised by **24**, it is hard to say that wrongness could not figure into any of them. Given that our contemporary expressivist is happy to say that there is a property of wrongness, it will be perfectly acceptable to use it in explaining things that involve it. There are other explanations on hand, for sure. But that is true in any explanatory project. Hence I doubt that relying on a simple model of explanation is the key to saving the differences between moral realism and anti-realism. One might think that explanatory resources involving moral properties are just one more thing that will become available to both sides of the chasm.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>See Chrisman 2008 for more criticism of Dreier's proposal. He thinks Dreier's suggestion ultimately falls prey to creeping minimalism after all. Chrisman goes on to offer an inferentialist option for drawing the debate

### 5.3.2. The solution

Creeping minimalism is a problem for metaethics. It comes to light most explicitly by way of the success of quasi-realism, and its embrace of semantic deflationism. Our task is to employ truthmaker theory somehow in order to appreciate what is at stake in the metaethical debate. To do that, I suggest that we consider some very preliminary and I hope uncontroversial thoughts about metaethics in general.

Metaethics is the philosophical topic that asks philosophical questions about the domain of ethical thought and practice. There are a variety of kinds of philosophical questions, and so there are a variety of kinds of metaethical questions. We might ask about the metaphysics underlying ethical thought, or the epistemology behind it. We might ask questions about how ethical language works, or about what it is to have ethical beliefs. We might ask about the psychology of moral judgment, or even about the neurobiology behind it. There is, in other words, a multiplicity of metaethical projects. Some of these projects have already been adequately isolated and distinguished—take moral epistemology, for instance. But although there is a plurality of various metaethical projects, this plurality disappears from sight when the traditional metaethical views are adumbrated. We speak of the error theorist, the realist, the expressivist. But which projects are these theories engaged in? All of them? Certainly not. Just some of them? If so, then which ones? My suspicion is that the traditional metaethical views—including all the ones we have been exploring—have simultaneously been giving accounts of the metaphysics and the philosophy of language behind ethical thought, but without attending too carefully to the distinction. There is a perfectly natural

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between realism and anti-realism. I fear that his proposal, which relies on a distinction between theoretical and practical commitments, will likewise fall prey to the creeping minimalist. Why can't ethical commitments be theoretical? Can we not have a theory of ethics, in the relevant sense? Given my commitment to moral realism being a metaphysical thesis, my view predicts that any psychological or semantic basis for the distinction, including Chrisman's, will fail to be sufficient for properly grounding the moral realism debate.

sociological explanation for the (con)fusion. Expressivism was born from logical positivism and verificationism, views that sought to eradicate metaphysical inquiry and replace it with the analysis of language. Dummett's verificationism was an attempt to redefine debates about realism in semantic terms. Nowadays, we know better and keep our metaphysical and semantic ducks in their respective, separate rows. Now, if creeping minimalism poses a problem for understanding the debate in metaethics, we need first to ask: which debate? The one over the metaphysics of ethical thought, or the one about the nature of ethical language? If we hope to solve the problem of creeping minimalism, we need to keep those two metaethical projects separate.

I, of course, advocate understanding moral realism as a distinctively metaphysical thesis. Moral *realism* is about moral *reality*, and reality is the exclusive domain of metaphysics. Disagreements between moral realists and moral anti-realists are to be understood in terms metaphysical and ontological. Whatever divides realists from anti-realists should have something or other to do with reality, something that can cut metaphysical ice. What the problem of creeping minimalism shows is that semantic notions like propositions, reference, and truth cannot do the job. On our approach, the way to study metaphysics and ontology is to be engaged in the search for truthmakers (or other suitable ontological grounds). Hence, the way to understand what is at stake between various metaethical views (in the metaphysical subdomain of metaethics) is to understand how they give differing accounts of what makes moral judgments true, and how they do so. Realists offer moral facts and/or properties (of either naturalistic or non-naturalistic origin). Relativists offer moral frameworks. Constructivists and superassertibilists founder on the

truthmaking question, and end up with no good account on offer (so far as I can tell). Quasi-realists offer natural facts, but take on an anti-realist account of the truthmaking relation.

I consider, then, the problem of creeping minimalism solved. The first stage to the solution is simply to distinguish quite explicitly what in retrospect seems so obvious, namely, the plurality of metaethical projects and questions. Once we see that metaethical views may take a stand on one set of questions while setting another set aside, we can urge the extant metaethical positions to keep clear on the distinction between questions of moral metaphysics and questions of moral language. Questions of moral metaphysics are to be understood in terms of truthmaking, and regimenting the debate in this fashion shows that there still is real debate. Within the realist camp, we see naturalists and non-naturalists divide over the question what makes moral judgments true. They offer competing sets of truthmakers to do the job. We see certain metaethical anti-realists get out of the game of offering truthmakers altogether (by way of getting out of the game of moral truth). Truthmaking considerations also put enormous pressure on other anti-realist accounts. Superassertibilists and constructivists are shown to offer inadequate (or at least incomplete) accounts, and relativists emerge as simply dodging the original question. The quasi-realist, too, can be seen as engaging in moral metaphysics, but perhaps in a way consistent with the naturalistic realist. None of this metaphysical debate turns on whether we should adopt a deflationary account of truth, reference, or belief. As we saw in the previous chapter, truth and realism are neutral regarding each other.

As for questions of moral language and moral practice, there still seem to be important differences between the competing views. As Dreier shows, the way to understand those differences is not to be understood in terms of truth, belief, reference, or other semantic

notions. The legacy of the Frege-Geach problem (together with the important insights behind deflationism) is that ethical language is semantically on a par with other domains of discourse.<sup>72</sup> Thankfully, that semantic continuity is consistent with metaphysical discontinuity. What makes ethical judgments true may be very different in character from what makes judgments about the natural world true. (Or, as in the case of quasi-realism, the truthmaking relation in which the truths of scientific theories, say, stand is very different in character from the one in which ethical truths stand.) One might be tempted to say that while expressivists think that moral judgments project our attitudes on the world, realists think that our moral judgments represent the way the world is (e.g., Blackburn 1998: 77 and 2002a). But I am inclined to think that ‘representation’ here is just another notion that will get sucked up by the creeping minimalist vacuum. ‘The judgment that murder is wrong represents how things are with respect to murder’ seems a perfectly fine thing to say, regardless of one’s metaethical preferences. The lesson of creeping minimalism is that we cannot put all the metaethical weight on some particular semantic notion, and expect it to save the differences all by itself. The strength of the quasi-realist program, equipped with the right kind of deflationism, shows how that maneuver cannot work. To see what is at stake between projectivists and non-projectivists, we have to take in a broader view of what it is to engage in ethical thought, practice, and behavior. Here the projectivist has a detailed account, and a distinctive view. When we engage in ethical practice, we project our values, interests, and sentiments onto the world. The function of ethical discourse is to do just that. Non-

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<sup>72</sup>Recall from before that to accept certain canonical deflationary theses is not to accept them all. I happen to think that quasi-realists can get by in solving the Frege-Geach problem merely by recognizing the truth of linguistic and metaphysical deflationism. Conceptual deflationism is not at issue here. Hence, I think creeping minimalism is a potential problem for just about everyone, since just about everyone had better accept linguistic and metaphysical deflationism.

projectivists think that the function of ethical discourse is not to project anything on the world, but to describe what is there antecedently.

The main point of the foregoing is that we have questions about what makes moral judgments true on the one hand, and questions about the function of moral judgments in our thought and practice on the other. Separating out the two questions, we can give sophisticated views that try to make best sense out of both. This sort of separation is the real answer to the problem of creeping minimalism. We want to understand what is at stake in metaethical debate; to understand that, we have to recognize that there are different projects and different questions afoot.

#### 5.4. Progress in metaethics

In section 5.2, I argued that we can use the truthmaker approach to realism developed in chapter 4 in order to offer an understanding of what is at stake in the debate over moral realism. The truthmaker approach both properly categorizes the various views on the correct side of the realist/anti-realist divide while at the same time explaining why those theories deserve to be there. One additional benefit of this approach was explored in section 5.3, where I showed how we can use truthmaker theory to dissolve the problem of creeping minimalism. In this section, I want to sketch how truthmaker theory can also put pressure on various metaethical views. Hence, rather than merely pouring old wine into new bottles, we can use truthmaker theory to make some progress in the debate. Specifically, I think considerations involving truthmaker theory can be used to argue that, on the realist side, naturalism is the strongest metaethical contender, and that, on the anti-realist side, quasi-

realism is the most defensible view. As for the choice between naturalism and quasi-realism, truthmaking considerations do offer a modest argument in favor of the latter.

Consider first the various anti-realist views. The older contenders—classical non-cognitivism and error theory—must give up something that most parties to the metaethical debate seek to uphold: the existence of ordinary moral truth. Minimalism about truth (and, in its wake, truth-aptness) together with worries about the Frege-Geach problem are sufficient to dispose of traditional non-cognitivism, especially since there are newer forms of expressivism available that avoid those problems while preserving some of the emotivists' initial motivations. Error theories are saddled with finding a discourse systematically defective. Relativistic views face difficulties when trying to account for the normativity of moral judgments, given their logical austerity once their true relativistic form is revealed.

These problems are familiar, and so views like constructivism, superassertibilism, and quasi-realism are attractive precisely because they all uphold the existence of absolute moral truth while not succumbing to realism. But the first two of those views founder when it comes to our truthmaking inquiries. Constructivists and superassertibilists like Wright point to certain counterfactual conditionals to elucidate the truth of moral judgments, but then fall silent as to the metaphysical status of those counterfactuals. Unless an account of what makes those counterfactuals true is forthcoming, the truthmaker theorist has a valid complaint against such theories. They refuse to engage the topic of moral realism by refusing to engage in what it is about the world that makes moral judgments true. Whatever the merits of the projects, they fail to take seriously a key metaethical question: what makes moral judgments true?

Suppose, however, that these accounts think that their counterfactuals hit rock bottom. They are themselves true, and serve to account for the truth of moral judgments even though nothing accounts for their truth. They are metaphysically brute, in other words: makers of truth that are not themselves made true. We have been countenancing the existence of such views, but have hardly been bestowing any praise upon them. Here is how the view would work: Suppose again that **6** is true:

(6) Any ideal observer would judge that kicking dogs is wrong.

If so, then it is true that kicking dogs is wrong. But perhaps the truth of **6** is just a brute fact, an unexplained explainer as it were. If so, **6** is non-discriminating; its truth is nowise reflected in the world. As such, there is a possible world metaphysically indiscernible from the actual world—all the same stuff exists, and the distribution of all the properties and relations is the same—but where **6** is false.<sup>73</sup> It's just a brute fact that our world is the one where **6** is true, even though our world's identical twin holds it to be false.

It now becomes apparent that taking moral judgments to be non-discriminating truthmaker gaps is not the way to go (even if, following Azzouni, it is the way to go with numbers). Part of the practice of engaging in ethical discourse consists in giving reasons for our moral beliefs, and providing for them suitable grounds. Recall this passage from Blackburn above:

Ethical avowals, like decisions and verdicts, require grounds. If I grade one paper higher than another, I must be prepared to indicate some relevant difference between them. We acknowledge the need to point to something that grounds our judgement, in virtue of which one is better than the other. (1998: 69)

When trying to account for why kicking dogs is wrong, we are obligated to offer grounds that justify the ethical judgment. Hence we appeal to the fact that kicking dogs causes them pain,

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<sup>73</sup>Unless **6** is necessarily true, which seems false. Imagine a world where kicking dogs bestowed upon them eternal happiness. Any ideal observer that forbade kicking dogs in such a world would be a moral monster.

or leads to greater unhappiness, or something similar. These appeals are not merely epistemological; if the wrongness of kicking dogs is metaphysically isolated from the fact that it causes them pain, then it would be completely arbitrary as to why that natural fact was relevant to the wrongness of the act, and not some other natural fact (such as that kicking dogs releases energy). For the stated natural facts to be *grounds* for the ethical claims, they have to stand in the proper relationship to them. When ethical judgments bottom out too quickly—as with taking **6** to be a non-discriminating truthmaker gap—we give up on that obligation. It just becomes a brute fact that the world is one way ethically, and not some other way. But this is out of sync with what it is to be an ethical thinker. Ethical thinkers offer an account of what makes things have the moral properties that they do. The lesson is that ethical judgments (or the counterfactuals supporting them) are not good candidates for being non-discriminating truthmaker gaps. Positing them as such would relieve us of the duty of offering grounds for our ethical claims. If such counterfactuals were brute facts, then we could justify all ethical claims (quite correctly) merely by referencing the workings of the Committee: “Why is torturing babies wrong? Well, the Committee wouldn’t approve, and that’s just a brute feature of reality.”

If ethical judgments were non-discriminating truthmaker gaps, then we could easily understand why any such view that posited them as such qualifies as being anti-realist, for moral truths would then enjoy their truth entirely independently of reality. But since one can be an anti-realist without resorting to non-discriminating truthmaker gaps, I suggest that no moral anti-realist take refuge here. Hence all metaphysical metaethicists, realist and anti-realist alike, should never claim that the truth of moral judgments does not accompany any metaphysical commitments. Even if one is an anti-realist, or an epistemicist about moral truth,

one should not deny that moral truths make a difference to the way the world is. To think otherwise is to take moral truths as brute, which is anathema to ethical thought and practice. If Wright or the constructivists are indeed committed to brute moral truths, I conclude that their views are false. If they are not so committed, then they owe us an account of what makes their preferred counterfactuals true.

The foregoing presents an argument to the effect that taking moral truths (or truths like **6** that are one step removed from first-order moral truths) as metaphysically brute—i.e., non-discriminating—is out of sync with proper moralizing. It will be useful to compare this argument with a similar predecessor, Blackburn's original supervenience argument against moral realism (1971, 1985b).<sup>74</sup> The literature on supervenience seems to take its jumping off point from examples like this:

If I said 'Smith acted rightly in giving her the money, but he might have given her the money, and in all other respects acted similarly, except that his act was not right', I should invite the comment 'But how could the rightness of the act disappear like this? If the act, motives, circumstances, &c., were all the same, then you would be bound, logically, to judge it right in the hypothetical case as you did in the actual case. The actual action couldn't have been right and the hypothetical action not right, unless there had been *some* other difference between the actions, or their circumstances, or their motives, or something else'. (Hare 1952: 153).

Such examples are supposed to bring out the idea that the moral supervenes upon the natural.<sup>75</sup> If two circumstances somehow differ in their moral features, then the naturalistic features of those circumstances must also differ somehow. To maintain that two circumstances could be completely indiscernible naturalistically, and yet differ in their moral

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<sup>74</sup>For further discussion of the argument see Blackburn 1984b, Hare 1984, Klagge 1984, 1987, and 1988, McFetridge 1985, Elliot 1987, Noonan 1987, Price 1988: 77-82, Dreier 1992, Horgan and Timmons 1992b, and Shafer-Landau 2003: 84-98.

<sup>75</sup>See also Moore 1903 and 1922: 260-261.

status, is to manifest incompetence in ethical thinking. It is taken to be a matter of ethical competence that one recognize the supervenience of the moral upon the natural.

The difficulty for the moral realist is as follows (though it can only pose a problem for non-naturalistic realists). The moral is said to supervene on the natural. But there is no entailment (in all cases) from the natural to the moral (recalling Hume's maxim that one cannot derive an ought from an is). Hence, we are loathe to think that two things naturalistically indiscernible may differ in their moral features, even though the lack of entailment between the two domains gives rise to some sense in which it's possible for the two to come apart. Why, then, do we uphold the supervenience requirement? Blackburn thinks that the anti-realist has the correct reply: we project moral features onto the natural world, and do so in an orderly, disciplined manner. It is no part of moral thinking to be arbitrary. If moral thinking is the game of gilding and staining the natural world with ethical colors, and this game is to be properly disciplined, then our gilding and staining should be consistently and systematically applied. Since the natural world is all the world there is, we must consistently and non-arbitrarily gild and stain it with our moral projections. To reject the supervenience constraint—to start arbitrarily attributing moral features to things, irrespective of their natural features—is to give up the game of morality. Supervenience is a constraint on moralizing that is fundamental to the practice.

But the issue cannot be handled so adroitly by the non-naturalistic realist. There is no entailment from the natural truths to the moral truths. Furthermore, the realist thinks that the moral features of the world are neither reducible to nor identical with the natural features of the world. The moral represents an independent, *sui generis* domain of reality. But if so, it becomes quite mysterious why moral supervenience should hold: if the moral and natural are

independent domains of reality, then why should the naturalistic facts constrain the moral facts? As Blackburn concludes, “Supervenience becomes, for the realist, an opaque, isolated, logical fact, for which no explanation can be proffered” (1971: 111).

I actually think Blackburn underplays his hand here (though the literature tends to go in the opposite direction—see the references in footnote 74). To see why, let’s think through one possible realist metaphysics. Suppose there are two moral properties, *good* and *bad*, here understood as immanent universals. Let’s suppose that there are events, and that they instantiate the moral properties. The bombing of Dresden, let’s say, instantiates *bad*, whereas Lincoln’s freeing of the American slaves instantiates *good*. Both events instantiate plenty of other non-moral universals as well, but let us simplify and just assume that the bombing instantiates the natural universal *European* (and nothing else) whereas the freeing instantiates the natural universal *American* (and nothing else). In this toy universe, we have the bombing of Dresden being bad and European, whereas the freeing of the slaves was good and American. We are taking the two events as basic particulars, and the four properties as universals. As such, all six things are independent existences,<sup>76</sup> and thus can be recombined according to the canons of good combinatorial reasoning.<sup>77</sup> But immediately we see that the realist cannot respect supervenience. For a particular’s instantiating some universal is a matter between that particular and that universal; that is what recombination between distinct existences is all about. Whether the two events instantiate *good* or *bad* is a matter completely independent of whether they instantiate any natural universal, including *American* and *European*. Some universal N cannot constrain the instantiation of some other universal M if indeed N and M be distinct existences. If the moral and the natural represent distinct,

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<sup>76</sup>Suppose for the purposes of the example that the locations of these events are not essential to them.

<sup>77</sup>See Armstrong 1989a.

independent ontological dimensions, then by combinatorial reasoning we can construct all sorts of possible worlds that do not respect the supervenience of the moral on the natural. In our toy universe, for example, both events could be American, and yet one be good whereas the other is bad. Hence, I conclude that non-naturalistic realists are committed to rejecting moral supervenience, and thus their view is false. Blackburn's more modest conclusion is that realists do maintain moral supervenience, but they, in effect, have to give up combinatorial reasoning. We cannot recombine to form "mixed worlds" where two things instantiate the same natural universals, but only one of them instantiates some moral universal. Here we have necessary connections between distinct existences—that is, violations of the principle of unrestricted recombination—which, I think, is just another way of restating Blackburn's "opaque, isolated, logical fact" objection. Realists must maintain that we cannot so recombine, but seem to have no principled reason for the stipulation. Because I embrace combinatorial reasoning, non-naturalistic moral realism is here shown to be false. Surely realists will find fault instead with the combinatorial reasoning, but I caution against such drastic (and seemingly unprincipled) metaphysical and logical destruction.

The older supervenience argument shows that moral reality (understood either in terms of non-natural facts or properties) cannot be an independent existence. If it were, then reality could have been such that distinct things naturally indiscernible were nonetheless morally discernible. Understanding what it is to be a proper, non-arbitrary moralizer shows such possibilities to be fraudulent. The world could not have been that way, and so the moral cannot be its own independent metaphysical domain. Non-naturalistic moral realism posits the autonomy of the moral, and so is committed to a false conclusion for moral modal metaphysics.

The newer truthmaking argument shows that moral truths cannot be metaphysically brute—they cannot be non-discriminating truthmaker gaps, in our phrase. Here we have an argument against possible types of *anti-realism* like Wright’s view and constructivism. Positing such brute truths again bestows a level of metaphysical autonomy to the moral that it does not possess. If some contingently true moral judgment  $p$  is a non-discriminating truthmaker gap, then there is a possible world metaphysically indiscernible from our own where  $p$  is false. Nothing in our world accounts for  $p$ ’s truth, just as nothing in our twin world accounts for its falsity. Here the lesson is that moral truths cannot be grounded by *nothing*.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, the old supervenience argument shows that moral truths cannot be grounded by a *sui generis* moral reality. The new supervenience argument (for recall that non-discriminating truthmaker gaps just are violations of the supervenience of truth upon being) shows that moral truths cannot be grounded by nothing at all. Moral practice requires that moral truths be grounded in something, and the startling fact of the supervenience of the moral upon the natural gives us an obvious clue: moral truths are grounded by the natural features of the world, and nothing else. Hence we have uncovered an important similarity between the most robust realism we have encountered (such that moral truths are grounded by an independent, *sui generis* realm of being) and one quite robust version of anti-realism (where there are moral truths, but they are nowise reflected by reality). Both extremes founder by isolating the ethical. Non-naturalistic realists isolate the ethical from the rest of the world; (certain possible) anti-realists isolate it from everything whatsoever.

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<sup>78</sup>Cf. Horgan and Timmons 2006b on the “groundless objection” for expressivists. They find the idea of moral truths as non-discriminating truthmaker gaps perfectly legitimate. Their central error concerns a conflation between truth and truthmaking, such that things that are only “disquotationally true” (whatever that means) require no ontological grounds.

Of all the various metaethical anti-realisms, quasi-realism has the best means for answering the truthmaker theorist's questions. They have truthmakers to offer, and a projectivist account of truthmaking that ensures the view's anti-realist credentials. As for the realist side of things, the previous discussion of Blackburn's supervenience argument should make evident where my sympathies lie. Having moral judgments made true by a realm of independent moral facts upsets the supervenience that obtains between the ethical and the natural. When it comes to moral realism, naturalists and quasi-realists are the best games in town. But which is better?

First, recall the plurality of metaethical projects. Not all metaethical questions are settled by settling the metaphysical ones. In particular, settling on the metaphysics does not settle how to think about ethical language or practice, which is where naturalists and quasi-realists diverge the most. Even more important to notice, neither does settling on how moral language works settle the metaphysics underlying it.<sup>79</sup> Recall Blackburn's contention that "no complete theory of ethics can simply point to the grounding properties, and suppose that evaluations are given their meaning by their relationship to them. We need first to understand the evaluative stance" (1998: 69). I take this passage to be a recognition of the fact that even if the naturalist's grounding properties are present, and the right ones for us to be attending to, we do not yet understand what it is to be an ethical thinker, or what role ethical judgments play in our language, thought, and life.<sup>80</sup> I wholeheartedly agree. For example, we do not need to accept the naturalistic realist's account of how moral language works. We need not think that they have told us the correct story of what moral judgments *mean*, even though

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<sup>79</sup>Consider also Schaffer's distinction between ontological grounding and conceptual analyzability (2008a: 309). That moral truths are not a fundamental feature of reality—that they require ontological grounds—does not entail they may be conceptually analyzable into non-moral terms.

<sup>80</sup>See also Blackburn 1998: 121.

they may have got it right with respect to what makes them true. For truthmaker theory allows us to see quite clearly that the project of saying what statements mean and what makes them true come apart. Truthmakers are not meanings. (Though meanings, if they exist, are truthmakers.)

What separates quasi-realism from naturalism is the former's projectivism and expressivism. Moral properties are projected onto the natural world, and our moral judgments are expressive of our attitudes and sentiments in a way that other judgments are not. As a result, the reason why certain natural facts stand in the truthmaking relation to moral facts is due to our projections, and not the modal features of the natural world. Such distinctive projectivist views may get lost in the attempt to take moral properties and facts and reduce them to or identify them with natural properties and facts. To the extent that such projects strike the quasi-realist as being beside the point, the quasi-realist betrays his real interest in ethical *practice* and ethical *language*. And those are perfectly fine interests to have. All I am stressing here is that there are other interests, distinctly metaphysical interests that also deserve a proper hearing. Accounting for how ethical language works does not yet account for how ethical reality is.<sup>81, 82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Cf. the neo-expressivist view defended by Bar-On and Chrisman. They hold their expressivism to be a distinctly psychological thesis that is neutral with respect to questions of moral reality (2009: 142). I am, in effect, advocating that Blackburn take a similar stance regarding his own view, and not think (as is implicit in his writings) that his views about the nature of ethical language silence issues about the nature of moral reality.

<sup>82</sup>It might be useful to compare my treatment of moral realism here with van Fraassen's treatment of scientific realism (1980), which we take up in full in the next chapter. Van Fraassen defines scientific realism and anti-realism in terms of the *aim* of scientific practice, in terms of what counts as success in the scientific endeavor. As such, van Fraassen is willing to grant much of the metaphysics and semantics of his realist opponents. The realist and anti-realist can agree on the content of a scientific theory, and need not think that the distinction between the observable and the unobservable is of any metaphysical relevance. It is of epistemological significance, however, and so van Fraassen's anti-realist constructive empiricism has sometimes been described as (merely) "epistemological" (Musgrave 1985, Arthur Fine 2001). On days where I feel like enforcing strict semantic distinctions, I am inclined to say that epistemological distinctions have nothing to do with a *realism* debate. Cf. Arthur Fine: "Any student in a freshman philosophy course knows that realism is a metaphysical doctrine" (2001: 120). Still, notice the lesson we may draw from van Fraassen. Realists and empiricists can

This project is not the place to evaluate naturalism and quasi-realism with respect to their competing views on the semantics and psychology of ethical practice. But truthmaker theory does, I think, offer a modest argument in favor of quasi-realism when it comes to the metaphysics of morals. An important advantage over naturalism of the quasi-realist's projectivist account of moral truthmakers is that it preserves a metaphysical version of Moore's open question argument (1903).<sup>83</sup> Moore argues that any identification of the property *good* with some natural property *n* would leave open the question: But is *n* good? It is always an open question whether any naturalistic identification of goodness *means the same thing* as goodness. Naturalists have circumvented Moore's argument recently by pointing to the existence of *a posteriori* necessities such as water's being composed of H<sub>2</sub>O. It's not analytic that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, and so no amount of conceptual analysis will reveal its essence. Moore's argument, according to naturalists, only shows that there is no *conceptual* connection between goodness and any natural property. For all that, there may still be relations of metaphysical necessity to be found.<sup>84</sup>

But the argument can be revived in metaphysical terms. On the metaphysical side of things, we can put the point this way, as Blackburn in fact has: "it is always an open question, something that can be discussed and denied, whether some given feature of things is the thing that determines whether they are good" (1998: 15). If we read this passage in the spirit of

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agree on the metaphysics of scientific theories. They agree on what the world would be like (and what would belong in our ontology) if some scientific theory were true. Compare: quasi-realists and naturalists can agree on what the world would be like if some ethical theory were true—they agree on what metaphysical commitments accompany our ethical commitments. Nevertheless, there are important distinctions to be drawn between realists and empiricists in *just what it is to practice science, and what it is to commit to scientific theories*. Compare: there are important distinctions to be drawn between quasi-realists and naturalists in *just what it is to engage in moral thought and practice*.

<sup>83</sup>This shouldn't come as too great a surprise, since the original open question argument takes any sort of naturalism about morality as its target.

<sup>84</sup>See Horgan and Timmons 1992a and 1992b for critical discussion of the issue.

truthmaker theory, we can see that the punch line of the open question argument for truthmaker theory is that it's always an open question what it is in the natural world that makes ethical judgments true. To offer competing accounts just is to engage in ethical thought and practice; the issue can't be resolved, once and for all, by semantics alone. Quasi-realism scores points over naturalism by being able to respect the phenomenon of openness that lies at the heart of the open question argument. If we take the open question phenomenon seriously, then the quasi-realist has the resources to accommodate it.

## 5.5. Conclusion

I opened the present chapter by suggesting that we could insightfully regiment the debate over moral realism into a debate about truthmakers. And indeed, many of the traditional theses, arguments, and objections that constitute the metaethical terrain can be understood perspicuously through the lens of truthmaker theory. But I hope also to have shown that we can go further than merely pouring old wine into new bottles. We saw distinctive truthmaking-based reasons to be dissatisfied with Wright's superassertibilist view, as well as the view of the moral constructivists. We have also seen how thinking about truthmaking helps us understand better and ultimately avoid the problem of creeping minimalism. Further, I am inclined to say that in thinking about metaethics in the right way, we may well be in a strong position to support the quasi-realist program (provided it eschews its traditional anti-metaphysical rhetoric; not to engage in thoroughly realist metaphysics is not to abandon engaging metaphysics wholesale).

To see why I think quasi-realism emerges as the best metaethical contender, recall again the "new paradigm" in metaethics. I take it that the issues surrounding the Frege-Geach

problem had the effect of causing a metaethical crisis that ended up bringing about a metaethical revolution.<sup>85</sup> Realists and anti-realists alike now take it for granted that there are moral truths. Eradicating moral truth from our worldview is no longer the most salient means of securing one's anti-realist inclinations.<sup>86</sup> But when we turn to the contemporary anti-realist accounts that try to save moral truth, we see that they all, save for quasi-realism, founder on the truthmaking question. The view that moral judgments are metaphysically brute is inconsistent with how ethical practice and thought works, so they need some sort of metaphysical accounting. But Wright and the constructivists are at pains to adequately address that concern (and thus engage in the "flight to counterfactuals", a move that has been the rallying cry of truthmaker theory since the beginning).

Quasi-realists, at least when they are not employing their anti-metaphysical rhetoric, have recognized such need. What makes it wrong to kick dogs (i.e., what makes it true that kicking dogs is wrong) is that it causes them pain. In defending our ethical views, we need to be able to offer such accounting. Moral truths need to be anchored, even if those anchors can be found only in the natural world. The moral truths simply cannot float free of the way the natural world is. Views that take moral *truths* to be metaphysically brute (as in constructivism or superassertibilism), or that take moral *entities* (like moral facts or properties) to be *sui generis* creatures will fail to satisfy the need for proper (i.e., supervenience respecting) anchoring.

Quasi-realists, then, have a decent account of what makes moral judgments true: it's the natural world, understood in terms of natural facts, natural properties, or whatsoever

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<sup>85</sup>Here, of course, I am borrowing the familiar language of Kuhn 1962.

<sup>86</sup>Though contemporary fictionalists like Joyce (2001) are working hard to develop sophisticated versions of error theory. Of course, fictionalism is itself an attempt to soften the appearance-denying nature of error theory.

please your overall metaphysical prejudices. Here they triumph over their fellow anti-realists. But their account is also superior to the non-naturalistic realist, for the quasi-realist can better account for the sorts of anchoring that ethical judgments require. What the original supervenience argument shows is just what the new truthmaker argument (against non-discriminating moral truths) shows: the moral cannot be primary. Just as the truthmaker theorist is motivated by the idea that truths are not fundamental, that they are grounded in something else, quasi-realists recognize the fact that ethical reality is not fundamental. Ethical truths need to be anchored, and that anchoring must consist in something other than a *sui generis* moral reality. To think otherwise is to miss a crucial feature of moralizing.

It is also worth noting that the quasi-realist, if he accepts my gift of naturalistic moral truthmakers, can meet the objection that his view cannot maintain the objectivity of moral discourse. Blackburn (1999) thinks the quasi-realist can maintain the objectivity of moral discourse, but his own defense is likely to be seen as just missing the point, from the point of view of his objectors.<sup>87</sup> The relativistic worry about quasi-realism is that if you and I disagree about the truth of some moral judgment, then the quasi-realist has no grounds on which to establish that there is a fact of the matter as to who is correct. There are no moral facts making it true, so the worry is that the grounds for its truth must lie in our attitudes (in which case we have given in to relativism or subjectivism), or nothing at all (since the quasi-realist rejects both the realist's and the relativist's accounting of moral truthmaking).<sup>88</sup> The relativist here has the right truthmaking worry: the quasi-realist has to posit ontological grounds for moral truth, but eschews all the obvious means for doing so. If there are no grounds for moral

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<sup>87</sup>See, for instance, Rasmussen 1985.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. A. W. Moore (2002) on the relativistic notion of "metaphysical even-handedness" to which he thinks Blackburn is committed. I admit that I do not know what Blackburn means when he replies that "metaphysics" is "silent" but not even-handed regarding ethical verdicts (2002c: 174).

truth, then it looks like there is no fact of the matter as to who is right in our moral disagreement. Even by the quasi-realist's lights, moral truth is not a brute metaphysical feature of the world. Blackburn's objectors are worried that the quasi-realist is cheating—he claims moral truth for himself, but rejects the duty of offering grounds for it. The worry is a distinctly metaphysical one—not the epistemological worry that Blackburn considers about how we can convince others that they are wrong in their moral beliefs (1999: 221).

Blackburn might respond that we are just here presupposing a substantive theory of truth, but that is to misunderstand the issue. That truths require ontological grounds is no offense to the claim that truth itself is a metaphysically transparent property. Truthmaker theory holds that truth is not a primitive, fundamental feature of the world. It is no axiom of deflationism that it is. So Blackburn's acceptance of deflationism is no excuse for ignoring the question of what makes moral judgments true. Does deflationism render truthmaking inquiries needless? To borrow Blackburn's phrase: "No, no, no". My offering to the quasi-realist is to accept the naturalistic realist's account of moral truthmakers, and in so doing answer the worries of those who suspect that quasi-realists cheat by claiming the existence of grounded moral truths without positing any grounds.

Quasi-realism, then, succeeds over its non-naturalistic realist opponent, and its fellow anti-realist opponents. Furthermore, it succeeds over naturalism by accommodating the phenomenon of the open question argument. Hence, careful attention to the metaphysics of truthmaking shows that quasi-realism may well be the strongest metaethical view when it comes to the question of anti-realism.

## 6. Three Paradigms of Scientific Realism

In the previous chapter, we saw how to apply our thinking about truthmaking to the realism debate in metaethics. Now we may turn to the question of what relevance truthmaking can have for the realism debate in the philosophy of science. The debate over scientific realism, like other realism debates, is complicated by the fact that there are a diversity of ways of understanding what is at stake in the topic. As Kitcher observes, “There are almost as many versions of realism as there are antirealists, each ready to supply a preferred characterization before undertaking demolition” (2001: 151). As before, we shall be guided by the thought that realism debates are at heart debates about reality, and hence are metaphysical to the core. But like much else in philosophy, the topic of scientific realism has often strayed from metaphysics into the realms of language and epistemology. The goal of this chapter is to employ truthmaker theory in order to better appreciate what is at stake in the dispute between scientific realists and their opponents. Our eye will be directed specifically at the metaphysical implications that accompany the topic, for those will be the ones into which truthmaker theory can provide the most insight.

In order to get clear about our topic, this chapter explores what I call the three paradigms of realism.<sup>1</sup> There is the *truth-mongering* paradigm, which seeks to reduce the realism debate down to a theory about the nature of truth. There is the *methodological* paradigm, which sets up the debate with an eye toward the aim of scientific inquiry. And, finally, there is the *metaphysical* paradigm, which construes the debate as one over how to

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<sup>1</sup>For whatever reason, three is the magic number when it comes to scientific realism. See Horwich 1982 and Putnam 1982a.

interpret the metaphysical foundations of scientific theories. It will come as no surprise that I advocate the third paradigm. Our goal in this chapter is to appreciate where the other approaches to scientific realism stray from the domain of metaphysics, in order to be able to reconstruct a robustly metaphysical understanding of the debate. But, as before, our intent is not merely to pour old wine into new bottles. For we shall see just how our paradigms succeed and fail in their various attempts to articulate and answer the fundamental philosophical queries that drive our interest in scientific realism. Ultimately, the truthmaker theorist rejects the truth-mongering paradigm, and better captures its suggestions about the role that *truth* plays in scientific realism by showing how *truthmakers* play that role in the debate instead. As for the methodological paradigm, the truthmaker theorist respects its central questions, and merely stresses that since its focus is primarily epistemological, its fundamental concerns are orthogonal to truthmaking concerns. After developing the truthmaker-based metaphysical approach to scientific realism, I show how it nicely accommodates the topic of structural realism, and the various positions therein, which is the topic *de jour* in recent discussions of scientific realism.

### 6.1. The truth-mongering paradigm

The truth-mongering paradigm of scientific realism is the one that attempts to reduce the debate over scientific realism down to a debate regarding the nature of truth. The truth-mongering paradigm, then, is a blatant example of non-neutrality between truth and realism, which we met and rejected in chapter 4. The truth-mongering theorist is a particularly strong kind of non-neutralist, for not only does he think that certain views about realism require taking on a particular stance regarding truth, he thinks the question of realism *just is* a

question of which theory of truth is correct. Nothing separates the realist, the anti-realist, and the quietist besides their respective views on truth.

The most adamant defender of the truth-mongering approach to realism is Arthur Fine (1984a, 1984b, 1986). To his credit, Fine's construal of the realism debate bears an appealing theoretical simplicity and elegance. Common to all parties to the debate, Fine holds, is a rather "homely" attitude about science. This attitude—the *natural ontological attitude*, or 'NOA' (pronounced as in 'Noah')—holds that "it is possible to accept the evidence of one's senses and to accept, *in the same way*, the confirmed results of science" (1984b: 95). When I see a table in front of me, I begin to believe that there exists a table in front of me. Similarly, if science tells me that the table is made of atoms, then I begin to believe that the table is made of atoms. In other words, I take the same attitude toward scientific findings as I do toward the ordinary observations I make with my own senses. NOA thus takes the findings of science at "face value".

Realists, anti-realists, and quietists alike can all agree that the results of our best sciences are (at least approximately) true. What distinguishes the various positions is what they add to the core doctrine of NOA. The realist adds a correspondence theory of truth to NOA:

The realist adopts a standard, model-theoretic, correspondence theory of truth; where the model is just the definite world structure posited by realism and where correspondence is understood as a relation that reaches right out to touch the world. (1984a: 52).

The anti-realist, by contrast, adds some sort of pragmatic or epistemic theory of truth: "The antirealist may add onto the core position a particular analysis of the concept of truth, as in the pragmatic and instrumentalist and conventionalist conceptions of truth" (1984b: 97; see also Fine 1986: 157). The right attitude to take toward science, Fine argues, is simply NOA

itself, and nothing more. The basic idea is that if we want to understand the practice of science, we should take it simply on its own terms, and not try to add to it various philosophical theses—in particular, we should not attach any particular philosophical theory about the nature of truth to the claims of scientific theories. Hence, Fine writes:

NOA is inclined to reject *all* interpretations, theories, construals, pictures, etc. of truth, just as it rejects the special correspondence theory of realism and the acceptance pictures of the truth-mongering anti-realisms. (1984a: 62)<sup>2</sup>

NOA all by itself, unadorned by any philosophical theses, is the right attitude to take toward science.<sup>3</sup> Fine admonishes us to continue accepting NOA—it’s the natural attitude to hold, after all—but not to conjoin it with any particular conception of truth. The result is an understanding of scientific inquiry that is neither realist nor anti-realist. By taking on a sort of quietism about truth, Fine advances a *non*-realist and *non*-anti-realist attitude toward science.

Also among the truth-mongers are philosophers such as Putnam (or at least certain temporal stages of Putnam). Though Putnam admits that there may be a variety of views that go by the name ‘scientific realism’ (see his 1982a), one of his familiar opponents is “metaphysical realism”, a view he finds far less palatable than his own “internal” or “pragmatic” realism. When faced with a pair of mathematically and empirically equivalent theories that nonetheless have competing interpretations, the metaphysical realist thinks that there is a fact of the matter as to which is true (assuming one is), whereas the internal realist thinks that both are true. The difference is due to the metaphysical realist’s adoption of a

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<sup>2</sup>Note here where I borrow the language of truth-mongering. Ironically, I think it is Fine himself who is the truth-monger, for he thinks it is the notion that bears all the weight in the debate (even though he himself does not advocate a theory of truth, and so does not consider *himself* a truth-monger—the truth-mongers, for me, are those who take truth to be the notion that holds the theoretical weight). As I observed in section 3.2.1, it is ironic that someone like Fine, who has a deflationary attitude about truth, puts so much theoretical weight on it nonetheless.

<sup>3</sup>Interestingly, Fine’s fellow truth-monger Putnam refers to just this kind of attitude as a species of realism. See Putnam 1975-1976: 193.

correspondence or “recognition-transcendent” conception of truth, whereas the internal realist adopts a pragmatic conception of truth where truth is just “correct assertibility” (1982a: 197).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to Fine and Putnam, other philosophers have argued (or even just assumed) that particular theories of truth are essential to particular views about realism.<sup>5</sup> I have already argued, in general, that such non-neutrality is false. In this section, I want to diagnose, with an eye explicitly directed toward truthmaker theory, why the truth-mongering approach to scientific realism is a non-starter.

There is plenty to be said in criticism of the truth-mongering approach, independently of truthmaker theory.<sup>6</sup> First, we should in general be skeptical of philosophical strategies that argue against a view by saddling it with another view that the philosopher antecedently rejects. (Herein lie the dialectical dangers of non-neutrality.) Fine and Putnam, both suspicious of correspondence theories of truth, can quickly reject scientific realism by merely identifying it with some form of correspondence theory of truth (or by treating correspondence as a necessary condition on scientific realism). Employing correspondence theories in such a strategy is already dubious, given just how amorphous the notion of correspondence is in the theory of truth. Many have complained that we don’t have a clear idea of what such theories are supposed to be, Fine and Putnam included; it’s inappropriate for those making such complaints to turn around and then build the theory into other

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<sup>4</sup>For similar views see also Ellis 1985 and Jardine 1986. Newton-Smith 1989 and Niiniluoto 1999 offer excellent discussion and criticism of the approach.

<sup>5</sup>See the references to non-neutralists in section 4.1, particularly those mentioned in footnote 8. The work of Dummett and Wright is of special importance here, historically speaking.

<sup>6</sup>Musgrave 1989 is an excellent critique of Fine’s program; see also Jennings 1989: 237 and Psillos 1999, chapter 10. For discussion and criticism of Putnam’s internal realism, see Field 1982, Newton-Smith 1989, Davidson 1990: 307-309, Sosa 1993b, van Fraassen 1997, and Niiniluoto 1999.

positions they are seeking to reject. In other words, it is disingenuous to, on the one hand, claim not to know what correspondence theories are, and, on the other hand, claim that certain other philosophical theories are nevertheless committed to them. Correspondence theories of truth are familiar whipping boys in philosophy, and that they are being used to such purposes here is no great surprise.<sup>7</sup>

A second problem with the truth-mongering approach is that it turns the question of realism into something else. As a result, the question of *scientific* realism turns out to have nothing in particular to do with the philosophy of *science*. For Fine, realism is NOA plus a correspondence theory of truth. NOA is not up for debate; everyone who's epistemically sensible embraces NOA, realist, anti-realist, and quietist alike. As a result, the truth-monger argues against realism and anti-realism simply by arguing against correspondence and epistemic theories of truth. There is no need to engage the arguments from underdetermination, the pessimistic induction, the irrationality of scientific revolutions, or the no-miracles argument.<sup>8</sup> All we need to do to solve the realism debate in the philosophy of science is come to sensible conclusions about the nature of truth, an inquiry far removed from the philosophy of science.

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<sup>7</sup>For an example of one particularly egregious howler, note Putnam's casual insertion of the noumenal into his opponent's view. Putnam does not believe in "the metaphysical realist's notion of a description which "corresponds" to the noumenal facts" (1990: 40; cf. the notion of a "ready-made world" in Goodman 1978 and Putnam 1982b). So not only is the scientific realist one who believes that truth is correspondence with the facts, he believes that truth is correspondence with the *noumenal* facts. (Note: I have never seen a correspondence theory of truth that invokes the noumena. Have you?) Now we've saddled the realist with both a particular theory of truth and a misunderstanding of Kantian metaphysics! As I read Kant, the noumenal is what is antecedent to conceptualization. Talk of noumenal *anything* is nonsense (that's why Kant wouldn't talk about it—at least not in the *first* Critique), since to talk about such things would be to import concepts into the noumena, which is just categorical confusion. My overarching hunch about Putnam's dialectic between the internal and metaphysical realist is that it turns on saddling the metaphysical realist with an antecedently confused view. I conclude not that Putnam wins the debate, but rather that he has not set it up correctly.

<sup>8</sup>See, respectively, Psillos 1999, chapter 8, Laudan 1981, Kuhn 1962, and Putnam 1975.

Next, by turning scientific realism into something else, the truth-monger encounters what we may call the problem of inadvertent realism. One of Fine's main contentions is that science does not need to be supplemented by any philosophical theorizing. It does its task just fine without any help from philosophy. Let us admit the point. But we are interested in the nature of truth for its own sake, not because we are interested in the nature of scientific inquiry. Theories of truth can be motivated independently of any interest in any realism debate. And once such views are formulated and defended, they will apply in any domain of thought possessed of any truth. Science is one such domain, at least in the eyes of any NOAer (pronounced as in 'knower'). Hence, we accept science as providing us with some truth about the world (even if not the whole truth). Completely independently, we come to have views about the nature of truth, which then apply to the truths we find in science as much as anywhere else. Here we just have two distinct things—the findings of science, and the findings of the philosophy of truth—overlapping in the appropriate places. Does science *forbid* us from asking about the nature of truth? Of course not. We may grant Fine's point that science doesn't *force* us to ask such questions. But if science involves making true claims (as NOA says it does), then the best theory of truth applies to those claims. Consequently, NOAers who for independent reasons accept certain views about the nature of truth will find themselves saddled with an inadvertent commitment to realism or anti-realism.

Another preliminary reason to be dissatisfied with the truth-mongering paradigm is that it makes it quite difficult to engage in local or "retail" applications of realism. If realism or anti-realism about some domain requires adopting a particular theory of truth, then being a non-globalist about realism debates requires being a non-globalist (i.e., pluralist) about truth. For example, suppose I am a scientific realist but a moral anti-realist. As a scientific realist, I

accept the natural ontological attitude for science and embrace a correspondence theory of truth. But when it comes to ethics, I am an anti-realist. Presumably, moral realism for the truth-monger is just a combination of the “natural ethical attitude” with a correspondence theory of truth. To maintain my ethical anti-realism, I must reject either the correspondence theory of truth for ethics (in which case I am forced to adopt a pluralist position about truth), or the natural ethical attitude, which presumably would involve something like an error-theoretic attitude toward the domain.<sup>9</sup> Now, these consequences do not refute the truth-mongering approach. Some philosophers defend pluralist conceptions of truth (e.g., Wright 1992 and Lynch 2009), and some are happy to embrace error theories (e.g., Mackie 1977 and Joyce 2001). Indeed, the truth pluralism of Wright and Lynch is motivated by their pluralism about realism debates. My point is merely that we should not constrain our choices so heavily from the outset. We need a more subtle understanding of the relationship between truth and realism. The crude identifications of the truth-mongering approach cannot handle such subtlety.<sup>10</sup>

A final reason to reject the truth-mongering paradigm—and here we may segue into our discussion of truthmaking—is that it leaves no conceptual room for those who reject both correspondence and epistemic theories of truth, but yet do not give up altogether on the theory of truth. Specifically, it ignores deflationary theories of truth (e.g., Horwich 1990). Deflationists about truth generally agree that truth is not a metaphysically substantive property. Truth is an important logical device—useful for disquotation, generalization,

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<sup>9</sup>In fact, a helpful way of thinking about contemporary metaethics is that it seeks to uphold the natural ethical attitude, and not resort to the apparently revisionist tactics of classical non-cognitivism and error theory. Here we have again what Kit Fine calls “non-skeptical” anti-realism (2001).

<sup>10</sup>Moreover, we may want to admit localized realism even *within* a domain. We might want to be realists about particles, say, but not fields. Such localized views are even harder to maintain for the truth-monger. (Thanks to Marc Lange on this point.)

forming anaphora, etc.—but nothing more. As such, truth is not to be identified with any complex property such as “correspondence with the facts” or “practical utility”. As stated, the truth-mongering paradigm does not address deflationary views.<sup>11</sup> But perhaps Fine could happily say that the deflationist about truth, like his own “no-theory” attitude about truth, belongs alongside him in the non-realism camp. So perhaps Fine’s apparatus for approaching scientific realism can easily accommodate the deflationist.<sup>12</sup>

The present suggestion is that NOA plus deflationism about truth, just like Fine’s own view, constitutes a kind of non-realism (and non-anti-realism). However, such a view is not sufficient for constituting a genuinely “beyond the debate” attitude toward realism, as Fine desires. For whether or not one is a realist has nothing whatsoever to do with whether or not one is a deflationist about truth. To see why, we first need to appreciate the distinction between theories of truth and theories of truthmaking. Theories of truth aim to reveal the essence or nature of truth. They give an account of what property, if any, is held in common between all and only truths. Theories of truthmaking are up to a different task. They are ontological theories that offer accounts of what there has to be in the world to ground what is true. Given some true claim, truthmaker theorists aim to say what it is in the world upon which that truth depends.

As we explored in chapters 3 and 4, to be a deflationist about truth is not yet to take any stance on what truthmakers there are. Consequently, one can be a deflationist and take on

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<sup>11</sup>To be fair, when Putnam and Fine were putting forth their views in the seventies and eighties, deflationist views of truth did not have the same grasp on the philosophical mindset that they enjoy today. Nonetheless, the views of Ayer, Quine, and Ramsey were hardly unknown at the time (quite to the contrary), and it is surprising to see how their deflationary views seem not to earn a place in our truth-mongers’ setting up of the issue. Perhaps they subscribed to the false presupposition that if one is a deflationist about truth, then one cannot engage the question of realism. One ongoing goal of this project has been to offer as definitive a refutation as is possible of that persistent and pernicious presupposition.

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, at times Fine seems to express sympathy with deflationary views. See his 1986: 175.

all sorts of substantive ontological commitments, including those that are constitutive of realism. Imagine a NOAer who accepts deflationism about truth, but thinks that our best scientific theories are made true by unobservable entities like electrons, fields, forces, genes, and the like, and so commits to the reality of such entities. This is not a quietist understanding of science; it's a kind of realism. To be above the debate, as Fine wishes, one must avoid taking on any such metaphysical commitments. Fine's NOAers, in other words, must eschew the theory of truthmaking just as they eschew the theory of truth. Now, Fine's setup of the realism debate predates the contemporary resurgence in truthmaking. Still, it is implicit in his view that the ontological questions of interest to truthmaker theory belong to the theorizing and interpretation of science that the NOAer rejects. It is not enough, then, simply to be a deflationist if one is to be a genuinely quietistic NOAer. One must also reject any theory of truthmaking; one must be fully agnostic regarding not only the nature of truth, but about what, if anything, makes truths true.

So suppose I uphold with NOA that 'There are electrons' is true, and reject all substantive theories of truth. It remains an open question as to what it is that makes 'There are electrons' true. Realists might say electrons. Positivists might say tracks in cloud chambers. Phenomenalists might say certain sequences of observations. Social constructivists might say our discovery of electrons. Notice how the views characteristic of the various parties to the traditional scientific realism debate reemerge when we ask the truthmaking question. They do this even if we are deflationists about truth, or take no stance on the nature of truth. The real questions behind the debate persist, even when we set aside the theory of truth.

It would be a great offense to the spirit of Fine's attitude toward science if the NOAer held that while science needs no help from philosophy in understanding the nature of scientific *truth*, it could benefit quite greatly by being supplemented by a theory of scientific *truthmaking*. Hence, the genuine NOAer who is truly beyond the realism debate must also reject any theory of truthmaking. Science needs no interpretation, including no ontological interpretation of the sort offered by truthmaker theory. Consequently, we need to understand Fine as suggesting that his non-realist must make no claims at all about the ontology underlying the truths of science. Hence, he is forbidden from making even the most modest of claims, such as that 'There are electrons' is true in virtue of the existence of electrons. To do so would be to supplement NOA with a distinctly ontological theory, and science, says Fine, needs no such supplementation.

Is Fine really forbidden from making such modest claims, such as that electrons are the truthmakers for 'There are electrons'? Can't Fine agree with me that 'There are electrons' is true in virtue of the existence of electrons? After all, it seems that doing so is in accordance with good scientific thinking, and so is not to be rejected by the NOAer.<sup>13</sup> My response takes the form of a dilemma. If Fine accepts my truthmaking claim (and others like it), then I maintain that he counts as a realist by my accounting (which is developed below in section 6.3), for he takes the claims of science to be made true by a mind-independent reality. Here we have all the realism anyone could ever want. So if Fine goes this way, he leaves behind his "above the debate" angle. The natural ontological attitude turns out to be sufficient for realism.

If Fine rejects this truthmaking claim (and all other truthmaking claims), then we may take him at his word that he truly is above the realism debate. As such, we should interpret

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<sup>13</sup>My thanks go to Marc Lange, Huw Price, and Keith Simmons for all pressing me very hard on this objection.

him as thinking that the NOAer takes on no ontological commitments when taking on the truth of a theory. One earns truth without ontology only by severing *all* bridges between the two, regardless of whether they are built by the theory of truth, truthmaking, or ontological commitment. Consequently, Fine must refuse to embrace any such theory, a consequence which he recognizes: “NOA, as such, has no specific ontological commitments” (1986: 176). Indeed, it cannot have *any* ontological commitments.

Still, it might be thought that it is simply inconceivable that one could accept the truth of ‘There are electrons’ without also taking on an ontological commitment to electrons. But here we must be careful not to import any assumptions about how truth depends upon reality, for those are precisely the assumptions that a true metaphysical agnostic must reject. If we assume that Quine (1948, 1960) is right about ontological commitment, then of course we will assume that anyone who accepts the truth of ‘There are electrons’ will take on an ontological commitment to electrons. But Quine’s is not the only game in town. Azzouni (2004) and Hofweber (2005) both argue, on separate grounds, that we can embrace the truth of mathematics (including its existential claims) without thereby taking on any mathematical ontology. Such theories might seem to be impossible, but they appear so only if we start with certain presuppositions about how truths connect with the world. The lesson for Fine is clear: he can stay above the debate while maintaining the truth of scientific theories only by remaining fully agnostic about the ontology that grounds the truth of those theories.<sup>14</sup>

We can now appreciate why the truth-mongering approach to scientific realism should be rejected. By not sufficiently distinguishing issues concerning truth with issues involving truthmaking, the truth-mongers come to see the former as essential to the debate, whereas the

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<sup>14</sup>Alan Musgrave comes quite close to my interpretation of Fine, which he notes was not originally obvious to him. He describes NOA as “*a complete philosophical know-nothing-ism*. The NOA[er] is not committed to electrons, the moon, tables and chairs, physical objects, other people, his self, *anything at all*” (1989: 391).

latter is really the crucial notion. Once we relocate the debate to one about what makes scientific claims true, the possibility of debate between realists and anti-realists reemerges. For example, do we need unobservable entities as truthmakers for scientific claims, or can we make do with merely the realm of the observable? The truth-mongering approach never gets to the heart of the real metaphysical debate.<sup>15</sup>

In closing, we may acknowledge something importantly right about the truth-mongering paradigm. Fine's instinct is to think that the realist needs to add something that goes above and beyond NOA.<sup>16</sup> Infamously, Fine describes that something more as "a desk-thumping, foot-stamping shout of "Really!" (1984b: 97). But there is no distinction between being *true* and being *really true*, and loud noises add no cognitive content to our utterances. What really needs to be added is a realism-relevant theory of truthmaking that will supply a realist ontology that grounds the true claims of science.

That the distinction between truth and truthmaking is so easy to collapse is evident in the following observation of William Newton-Smith: the "realist wanted to say that our theories are true or false in virtue of an external reality and she or he used the vocabulary of correspondence in an effort to convey this" (1988: 188). Correspondence is *not* the way to convey this important idea; truthmaker theory offers the right way to understand what it is in virtue of which our theories are true or false.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>My promissory note about Fine interpretation from footnote 10 of section 4.1 is now discharged.

<sup>16</sup>Indeed, Fine is absolutely correct when he points out that "realism requires two distinct elements. It requires belief and it also requires a particular interpretation of that belief" (1986: 176). The idea here is that instrumentalists and realists may both agree that 'There are electrons' is true, and so their realism-relevant disagreement must lie elsewhere. As we shall see, the "interpretation" needed here gets construed by van Fraassen as a matter of "literal" versus "non-literal" truth. My suggestion will be that the interpretation needed here is the *ontological* one about what makes truths true.

<sup>17</sup>Related to the truth-mongers are the reference-mongers. Often, scientific realism has been defined with explicit connection to the theory of reference. The theory of reference has played a central role in both defenses (e.g., Boyd 1984) and critiques (e.g., Laudan 1981) of realism. Whether such reference to reference is essential

## 6.2. The epistemological paradigm

The epistemological paradigm of scientific realism treats the debate as one about the proper epistemic attitude to take toward scientific inquiry. This approach is advocated most prominently by van Fraassen, who writes that scientific realism “concerns our epistemic attitude toward theories rather than their internal structure” (1976: 632). According to van Fraassen, scientific realism is the view that the aim of science is to produce literally true theories—theories that are true not only with respect to the observable facts, but to the unobservable facts as well—and that acceptance of a scientific theory involves the belief that the theory is true (1980: 8).<sup>18</sup> Van Fraassen’s favored anti-realist—the constructive empiricist—holds that the aim of science is to produce empirically adequate theories, where empirical adequacy is a matter of truth with respect solely to observable phenomena. All that constructive empiricism requires by way of belief is that when one accepts a theory one believes it to be empirically adequate.<sup>19</sup>

In order to appreciate van Fraassen’s position, it is important to understand the historical context in which it was developed. In the heyday of logical positivism (or so the story goes), scientific anti-realism in the form of some sort of instrumentalism was king (e.g., Carnap 1956). Realism made an astonishing comeback thanks to the insightful critiques and arguments of, among others, Grover Maxwell (1962), Sellars (1963), J. J. C. Smart (1963), and Putnam (1975). Realism, it was claimed, is the only philosophy of science that doesn’t

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to the adherents’ arguments, or just a byproduct of more linguistic times, is an open question; certainly it is essential in the case of Kitcher’s defenses of realism (1993, 2001, 2002), and in Hardin and Rosenberg 1982. In any event, I am even less moved by the thought of framing realism debates in terms of reference than I am by the thought of framing them in terms of truth. For excellent critical discussions of the “flight to reference” in the philosophy of science, see Bishop and Stich 1998 and Bishop 2003.

<sup>18</sup>The presence of ‘literal’ in the account will be explained and elaborated upon below.

<sup>19</sup>There is also an important pragmatic dimension to the constructive empiricist’s notion of acceptance. To accept a theory is to take it into one’s life, using it as a foundation for offering explanations, pursuing research opportunities, etc. See van Fraassen 1980: 12-13.

make the success of science a miracle (Putnam 1975: 73; see also Smart 1963: 39). Van Fraassen's empiricism emerges as an anti-realist response to such realist arguments, but it sheds many of the untenable views that had led to the downfall of the logical empiricist views of science. Van Fraassen rejects their adoption of a strict dichotomy between observational and theoretical language, and rejects their instrumentalist readings of scientific theories. In effect, van Fraassen agrees with his realist opponents on the meaning and interpretation of scientific theories. There is not necessarily any *semantic* or *metaphysical* dispute between the two camps. Hence, some have identified van Fraassen's anti-realism as being merely epistemological (Musgrave 1985, Arthur Fine 2001). As a result, van Fraassen argues for the rationality of his empiricism on epistemological grounds.

It is important to recognize that van Fraassen's construal of the realism debate does not collapse back into the truth-mongering paradigm. To be sure, van Fraassen employs truth in defining scientific realism and anti-realism. But he does not reduce the question of realism to the theory of truth. Realists think that science aims to produce theories that are true with respect to both the observable and the unobservable. Constructive empiricists think that science aims to produce theories that are true with respect to the observable alone. But here, truth need not be understood as playing anything more than its usual abbreviatory and anaphoric role.<sup>20</sup> If snow is white, then scientific theories ought to entail that snow is white. If there are electrons, then realists think that theories ought to entail that there are electrons, though empiricists are more open minded. It is not one's *theory* of truth that makes one a realist or an anti-realist. What makes someone a realist or an anti-realist is the class of *truths*

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<sup>20</sup>Van Fraassen seems to be assuming a correspondence theory of truth in his 1980 (see pages 90 and 197), though he later disavows such theories (2006a: 153). But he needn't have committed to a correspondence theory. Deflationism would have suited his purposes just as well—save for the caveat I discuss in the following footnote.

that one thinks is relevant to the aim of science. Those steeped in the epistemological paradigm may remain neutral on the topic of the nature of truth in a way that truth-mongers may not.<sup>21</sup>

Van Fraassen's philosophy of science has been tremendously influential, and so has inspired an enormous literature that critiques and defends the view. Much of the criticism centers on the distinction between the observable and unobservable, which van Fraassen needs in order to distinguish truth from empirical adequacy,<sup>22</sup> and on the distinction between belief and acceptance, which van Fraassen needs in order to articulate the distinctive cognitive attitude of the constructive empiricist.<sup>23</sup> For our purposes, we may set aside the question of whether van Fraassen's account of the aim of science is a good one, and whether his empiricism is properly motivated.<sup>24</sup> What we are interested in is what truthmaker theory has to do with van Fraassen's setup of the question of realism.

The short answer is: not very much. As already noted, van Fraassen's approach to the question of realism is primarily epistemological. He deflects the realists' arguments that

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<sup>21</sup>Actually, the issue is more complex. In my 2009, I argue that constructive empiricists must rely on a notion of truth that requires more than the standard logical resources associated with deflationism. The problem is due to van Fraassen's adoption of the semantic (model-theoretic) account of theories. On the semantic account, we need some way of cashing out the isomorphism between the structure of the theory's models and the things in the world, and it is here that a pure deflationary theory of truth becomes untenable. That said, *if* scientific theories were merely sets of sentences or propositions or some other sort of truth-bearer (as in the syntactic view of theories), then van Fraassen's statement of realism and empiricism would be relying on truth in a deflationarily acceptable manner. But notice that this is a problem for anyone embracing the semantic account, realist or empiricist.

<sup>22</sup>See, for instance, Hacking 1981, Churchland 1985, Musgrave 1985: 207-209, Ladyman 2000, Dicken and Lipton 2006, and Dicken 2009 for criticism, and van Fraassen 1985 and Muller 2005 for defense. Note that the distinction between the observable and the unobservable is *not* the distinction between the observational and the theoretical, as van Fraassen expertly demonstrates (1980: 14). Terms and concepts are theoretical or not, depending upon whether they find their way inside theory. Entities are observable or not, depending upon their physical properties.

<sup>23</sup>See, for instance, Blackburn 1984b: 223 and 2002b, Horwich 1991, and Teller 2001: 139-142 for criticism, and van Fraassen 2001: 164-168 for defense.

<sup>24</sup>I happen to think it is. James Ladyman thinks it isn't, due to its apparent need for a robust modal metaphysics. See his 2000, and Monton and van Fraassen 2003, Hanna 2004, Ladyman 2004, Muller 2005, and Dicken 2009 for further discussion.

science requires belief in the truth of its theories, and sets aside the instrumentalists' reinterpretation of scientific theories. The only thing that seems to separate van Fraassen's realist from his empiricist is a view regarding the aim of science, and the epistemological attitudes it licenses. Truthmaker theorists need not have any particular views about epistemology, so truthmaker theory does not necessarily have any distinct contribution to make toward van Fraassen's epistemological arguments for constructive empiricism.

Fine detects some trickery behind van Fraassen's epistemological turn:

In redefining realism as a doctrine about truth and belief in the truth, van Fraassen set up the debate over realism as a debate over the reach of evidence. Does the evidence support belief in the truth of our theories or does it only reach as far as belief in their empirical adequacy? Notice that this is a purely epistemological question and this is the question on which almost all the recent literature in the realism debate has centered. Still, it really is a set up. Like a skilled magician doing slight [*sic*] of hand, van Fraassen's focus on the epistemological question has distracted us from what realism actually involves. Any student in a freshman philosophy course knows that realism is a metaphysical doctrine. It asserts the existence of a real, external world. In *The Scientific Image* van Fraassen made that world disappear from the debate. (2001: 120)<sup>25</sup>

I sympathize with Fine's sentiment here. Along with my first-year students, I too wish to stress the metaphysical core of scientific realism. But van Fraassen does not make the world disappear from the realism debate; rather, he simply assumes from the outset that it's there. If van Fraassen seems to be ignoring the older non-epistemological forms of anti-realism that actively denied the existence of a real, unobservable world, it's because the philosophical community is already happy to abandon them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>We know, of course, what Fine thinks about the world that he claims to be the *real* issue behind realism. (Note, though, the welcome disappearance of excessive capitals and italics!)

<sup>26</sup>Here is Stathis Psillos: "Semantic realism is no longer contested. Theoretical discourse is taken to be irreducible and assertoric (contentful) by all sides of the debate" (2000: 707). Interestingly, then, the question of scientific realism has moved in an opposite path than has the question of moral realism. In the old paradigm of metaethics, anti-realists rejected moral truth. In the new paradigm, they have searched for ways to maintain it on metaphysically austere grounds. In the days of positivism, anti-realists attempted to salvage the truth of theories

I have no objection to the importance of the central questions of the epistemological paradigm.<sup>27</sup> The question of what sort of epistemic attitude science warrants us to take is an important one,<sup>28</sup> and not one that can be solved from within truthmaker theory. My objection for van Fraassen is slightly different, and involves his analysis of *what realism is*. What van Fraassen needs to be able to explain is why believing in the literal truth of a scientific theory is a sufficient characterization of realism. Absent that explanation, it's not clear why van Fraassen's realist is deserving of the name.

To get clear on this objection, we can turn to a small puzzle that emerges from thinking about Fine's view and van Fraassen's in tandem. According to van Fraassen, to take a realist attitude toward science is to think that scientific theories aim at a literally true story of what the world is like, and that in accepting a scientific theory one believes it to be true. According to Arthur Fine, to take a non-realist attitude toward science is to take scientific theories "into one's life as true, with all that implies concerning adjusting one's behavior, practical and theoretical, to accommodate these truths" (1984b: 95-96). Constitutive of both positions is the belief that scientific theories are true. Where Fine sees quietism—an abandonment of both scientific realism and anti-realism—van Fraassen sees realism. How is this possible?

The explanation for the puzzle deals with how the two understand the bridge between truth and ontology. Fine thinks that by eschewing any theory of truth, we sever any possible

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by showing how they required no ontological grounding in the unobservable. Nowadays, the consensus seems to be that theories, in order to be true, do need the kind of grounding offered by realists.

<sup>27</sup>What I would object to is a view that held that *all* the important questions involving scientific realism were epistemic. This is not van Fraassen's view, though perhaps he might believe that all the important questions not yet settled in the debate are epistemic.

<sup>28</sup>Fine disagrees: "As for 'the aim of science', NOA thinks this is a chimera, conjured up in response to misplaced hermeneuticism and fear of the irrational" (1986: 177).

link between truth and ontology. By not accepting a substantive theory of truth, we can accept the truths of science without accepting any ontological or metaphysical commitments. But, as we have seen, what bridges truth and ontology is not the theory of truth, but the theory of truthmaking. Fine falsely sees quietism in taking theories to be true but not adorning them with a substantive theory of truth because he supposes that ontological and metaphysical commitments cannot be undertaken in the absence of a substantive theory of truth.

By contrast, van Fraassen sees realism in taking theories to be literally true because he is most likely assuming a fairly straightforward, realism-relevant conception of truthmaking.<sup>29, 30</sup> If theories are true, that is because there exists a mind-independent reality that makes them true. But notice that it is the commitment to that sort of reality, and not merely the commitment to the truth of the theory, that serves to explain why the realist is a realist. We can imagine competing theorists who brought anti-realist truthmaking accounts to the table; they would also believe that theories are literally true, but made true by something other than a world of mind-independent electrons, fields, forces, and genes. Realists must do more than believe that their theory is literally true, which, again, is the kernel of truth behind the truth-mongering paradigm.

My suggestion, then, is that van Fraassen sees realism in his statement of scientific realism only because he is assuming an ordinary, realist account of truthmaking. (Just what this is we shall explore in detail in the next section.) He might, however, think that the

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<sup>29</sup>In discussing his own account of scientific realism, Wright contrasts literal truth with disquotational truth (1986: 253). I admit that I do not quite understand the contrast here: disquotational truth is as literal as it gets! I think the idea may be that Wright suspects (alongside van Fraassen) that literal truth is needed for realism, and thus that literal truth must be something robustly metaphysical in a way that disquotationalism does not allow. We have seen this mistake before, and need not belabor it again.

<sup>30</sup>In fact, van Fraassen's talk of truth in *The Scientific Image* strongly suggests correspondence theory (1980: 90, 197).

presence of “literal” truth is what plays that role: a literally true theory just is a theory made true by a mind-independent reality. To motivate his view that realists believe in the literal truth of theories, van Fraassen gives the example of two empirically equivalent theories that nonetheless appear to disagree regarding the unobservable (1980: 10-11). One theory holds that all matter consists of atoms; the other replaces atoms with the existence of a universal continuous medium. A positivist who thought that statements like ‘Atoms exist’ and ‘The universal continuous medium exists’ bear meaning only through their connection with the observable consequences of their respective theories might hold that both theories are true, since they are empirically equivalent and hence “mean the same thing”, appearances to the contrary. Here we have a non-literal reading of the theories, for “two theories which contradict each other in such a way can ‘really’ be saying the same thing only if they are not literally construed” (van Fraassen 1980: 11).

There is something right about van Fraassen’s characterization of the literal construal of theories. By granting that realists and anti-realists alike can admit a literal reading of scientific theories, he helps to move the question of realism away from a question about language: “I do not conceive the dispute as being about language at all,” he says in distancing himself from Dummett’s semantic take on the debate (1980: 38). We can push the issue even further, for we can reconstruct the point about theories being true under literal or non-literal interpretations into a purely metaphysical point, and thereby distance ourselves even further from any linguistic approach to realism.

Imagine a more traditional anti-realist, constructive empiricist, and realist discussing ‘There are electrons’.<sup>31</sup> Suppose they all accept some scientific theory of which it is a

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<sup>31</sup>The traditional anti-realists I have in mind are those that van Fraassen seeks to exclude from realism by his literality requirement. He mentions conventionalism, logical positivism, and instrumentalism, saying of them

consequence. The anti-realist and realist agree that it is true, whereas the constructive empiricist announces agnosticism. Van Fraassen would say that the anti-realist thinks it is non-literally true, and that the realist thinks it's literally true. But might it be possible for the two to come to agree upon its meaning after all? Suppose that the realist and the anti-realist come to the table with rather thin semantic theories, or with perhaps none at all. Perhaps they are both use-theorists, or agree on some sort of inferential role semantics.<sup>32</sup> If so, we can still find room for non-semantic disagreement between them, and so we do not have to hold that they are simply talking past one another. The disagreement will be an ontological one. The realist thinks that 'There are electrons' is made true by electrons. But electrons, were they to exist, would be unobservable. So the anti-realist does not believe in such things. But the anti-realist does think that 'There are electrons' is true, and so must offer a competing story about what makes it true, since electrons aren't around to do the trick. Just how the story goes might be quite complicated, perhaps involving cloud chambers, readings on galvanometers, and the like. In any event, the resources for making the sentence true will be limited to the observable. The observable world itself suffices to ground the truth of 'There are electrons'; the realist disagrees, and takes on an additional ontological commitment involving unobservable entities. Such ontological disagreements may persist even if there are no semantic disagreements involved.

As should now be clear, agreeing on the meaning and truth of claims need not coincide with agreeing on what the truthmakers are for those claims. The constructive empiricist may agree with the realist about what it is that would make 'There are electrons'

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that they are consistent with the claim that "science is true if 'properly understood'" (1980: 9). What I shall be doing, in effect, is giving a metaphysical, not semantic, account of what it is to "properly understand" a theory.

<sup>32</sup>See, for instance, Brandom 1994.

true, if indeed it were true. Since our anti-realist and constructive empiricist may agree on what exists in the observable world, yet disagree over whether to believe ‘There are electrons’, they must disagree about what it takes to make it true (supposing, as we are, that they agree on its meaning). When it comes to other scientific truths, the truthmaking story may be more controversial. Whether ‘Electrons are negatively charged’ is made true by a state of affairs, relation between universals, collection of tropes, electrons themselves, or nothing at all is an open question. Here, a scientific realist who is also a realist about universals (e.g., Armstrong) may disagree with a constructive empiricist who is also a nominalist (e.g., van Fraassen). But here the dispute is due to their differing stances on the realism/nominalism question, and not to their differing stances regarding scientific realism. Van Fraassen, surely, would have no truck with many of the debates that are internal to truthmaker theory. Nevertheless, even a nominalist of his radical stripe can agree that truths are grounded in the world (Quine thought so, as did David Lewis); he just disagrees with others about what exactly those grounds are.

We may now appreciate how we can more fully shed the trappings of linguisticism from the question of scientific realism.<sup>33</sup> The dispute need not be over how to interpret theories, or whether we should construe them literally or non-literally. The instinct behind van Fraassen’s appeal to literal truth is better satisfied by appeal to truthmaking. In the next section, we shall spell out this distinctly metaphysical approach to the topic of scientific realism.

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<sup>33</sup>In his 1984, Jarrett Leplin offers ten theses common to various species of scientific realism (1-2). Of those, three make use of the notion of reference, and two others involve literal truth. Seven involve truth, but this is no evidence of semantic infiltration, at least given a deflationary reading of ‘true’. One involves the claim that scientific theories make “genuine, existential claims”, which presumably also relates to the literal truth of theories. As I hope to have made clear, the debate does not turn on issues about reference, literal truth, or which theory of truth is true.

### 6.3. The metaphysical paradigm

To get from truth to realism, we need the right sort of connection. Fine recognizes the point, and charges van Fraassen with leaving something important out of the debate. The question of realism is at heart a metaphysical question, and so van Fraassen's construal of things, according to Fine, leaves out something crucial. Actually, I think van Fraassen simply takes something for granted, which by the time of his writing was in fact a safe assumption: positivist attempts to write the unobservable out of scientific theories (semantically and metaphysically) have conclusively failed. As such, there is no avoiding the consequence that belief in the truth of a scientific theory will somehow involve a commitment to unobservable entities and/or properties. We shall not take the matter for granted. So let us now take a look at the field of views in the scientific realism debate with an eye toward truthmaking, and the metaphysical commitments that separate the various parties to the debate. In so doing, we may offer a proper articulation of the metaphysical paradigm to scientific realism, which will show just what is at stake, metaphysically speaking, in the debate between realism and its opposition.

According to the metaphysical paradigm, our commitments with respect to scientific realism are determined by the metaphysical and ontological commitments that we take to accompany our scientific commitments. In accepting a scientific theory, to what metaphysical or ontological account of the world are we committed? We can draw on **R<sub>4</sub>** from section 4.3.4 to give an account of scientific realism:

- (**R<sub>4</sub>**) To be a realist with respect to a set of propositions is (i) to be committed to the truth of some particular propositions of the set, (ii) to be committed to a realism-relevant ontology of the relevant kind in virtue of which those truths are true, and (iii) to maintain that those truths are true in virtue of that ontology in a mind-independent fashion.

Scientific realism is a commitment to the (at least approximate) truth of our best scientific theories, and a commitment to a realism-relevant set of truthmakers in virtue of which those theories are true—where the relation of truthmaking itself is a mind-independent matter. Scientific anti-realism either abandons the first commitment (thereby nullifying the second), or keeps the first, but supplements it with an anti-realism-relevant set of truthmakers, or acknowledges something in the neighborhood of projectivism when it comes to understanding the truth of scientific theories.<sup>34</sup> Truthmakers, then, are not exclusively for realists. Anti-realists, too, can admit that the truths they accept are made true. Their anti-realism will be due to the nature of the truthmakers they provide. Quietists, regardless of what they think about the truth of the theories they accept, must remain fully agnostic about what makes them true. According to the metaphysical paradigm, then, one's stance regarding scientific *realism* depends upon what one takes to be the *reality* underpinning scientific theories. The metaphysical paradigm rightly restores metaphysics to the center of the debate.

So what makes for a realism-relevant or anti-realism-relevant theory of truthmaking? There may be no simple answer, and I do not intend to give a full analysis. Nor should we hope for one. Realism debates come in various forms, and are motivated by different considerations in different areas. Still, mind-independence of some sort seems to be of paramount importance in much of the realism literature.<sup>35</sup> The kinds of truthmakers relevant to realism are the kinds of things that would still exist even if we didn't. Truthmakers that are indicative of anti-realism, by contrast, are likely to be entities that somehow depend upon us for their existence. Rather than attempting to offer precise analyses of realist and anti-realist

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<sup>34</sup>As far as I know, Jennings 1989 is the only paper to have taken up something like this last option.

<sup>35</sup>See Devitt 1984 and Jenkins 2005 for treatments of mind-independence. For a challenge to the notion of mind-independence, see Rosen 1994.

accounts of truthmaking, it will be more instructive to attend to specific views inside the realism debate, and see how their status vis-à-vis realism is best understood by attending to how they approach our truthmaking queries.

Fine, recall, claims that the scientific realist “asserts the existence of a real, external world” (2001: 120).<sup>36</sup> Putnam also considers the idea, which he attributes to Dummett, that scientific realism involves the claim “that what makes [the sentences of scientific theories] true or false is something *external*—that is to say, it is not (in general) our sense data, actual or potential, or the structure of our minds, or our language, etc.” (1975: 70).<sup>37</sup> Both of these remarks are close to the truth, and we may now elaborate upon them.

First consider the observable domain of scientific theories. Realists about the observable portions of scientific theories take those portions to be true, and to be made true by a mind-independent reality. Here we have little more than what Devitt calls “common sense realism” (1984). There is still plenty of room within the realist camp for truthmaking disagreement. When it comes to the truthmaker for ‘There is copper’, any hunk of copper suffices.<sup>38</sup> When it comes to the truthmaker for ‘This sample of copper is conductive’, the matter is more controversial. Perhaps we need a state of affairs here, a trope, or an object

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Melnyk 2003: 229, which holds that realism is committed to the view that current scientific hypotheses are “true or false in virtue of the way the mind-independent world is”.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Wright: “What, I suggest, scientific realism *essentially* maintains is, rather, just that (successful) scientific theories deal in aspects of *reality*: that there are aspects of the natural world for whose correct description the techniques of concept-formation used by theoretical scientists are indispensable” (1986: 253; cf. his 1992: 158-159).

<sup>38</sup>The tactics of Putnam and Fine would seem to suggest otherwise; their talk of “THE WORLD” (Putnam 1978) and “the *World*” (Fine 1986) is misleading, as if the truthmaker for realism about ‘There is copper’ required more than copper. Putnam, recalling footnote 7 of this chapter, seems to think that a noumenal fact is required as a truthmaker, whatever that might be. We should not be deterred by the bogies of capitalization and italicization, which suggest a hidden meaning not captured by ‘the world’. The world is all that you and I believe in, and our belief in it alone is sufficient for realism.

under a counterpart relation.<sup>39</sup> These familiar truthmaking accounts all rely on mind-independent entities to serve as truthmakers, and hence they all count as realist. Importantly, notice that nominalists and their opponents can disagree with each other about what makes such claims about the observable true without sacrificing their overarching realism about the observable. Anti-realists about the observable have to take a very different tack. What makes it true that there is copper is not the existence of that mind-independent element copper, but something else (see Putnam's suggestions in his quote above).

Where scientific realism becomes controversial is in the realm of the unobservable. Realists maintain the reality of the unobservable world, and commit to it in order to find truthmakers for the truths they believe about the unobservable. The truthmakers realists offer are of the standard realism-relevant variety: the truthmakers for claims about the unobservable are just as mind-independent as are the truthmakers they posit for claims about the observable. The realist maintains, in other words, a kind of metaphysical continuity between the observable and unobservable. Constructive empiricists accept that same metaphysical continuity alongside the realists, and therefore can agree with realists as to what it would take to make truths about the unobservable true, if indeed they are. However, on epistemological grounds constructive empiricists remain agnostic about the reality of such truthmakers, and thus remain agnostic about the truth of the unobservable portions of scientific theories.<sup>40</sup> They earn their anti-realism by not taking on the metaphysical

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<sup>39</sup>Again, see, respectively, Armstrong 2004, Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, and Lewis 2003.

<sup>40</sup>To be more precise, constructive empiricists hold that all that *science* requires of us when we accept its theories is that we believe them to be empirically adequate. But there could be extrascientific reasons for believing in the unobservable portions of theories. Constructive empiricists *qua* scientific thinkers must remain agnostic about electrons, but they might renounce such agnosticism for other reasons external to the scientific enterprise.

commitments that realists take on, even though they are in agreement as to what commitments they should take on, if they were epistemologically so inclined.

Other views about what makes statements about unobservables true, including anti-realist ones, are possible. What makes other views anti-realist is that they attempt to ground the truth of claims about the unobservable in something other than a mind-independent unobservable reality. Imagine a kind of phenomenalist who employed what we might call the “flight to counterfactuals”: What makes ‘There are electrons’ true is that it’s true that if we were to look at a cloud chamber in such-and-such experimental setup, then we would see certain kinds of tracks. That counterfactual could in turn be taken as a brute truth, made true by nothing at all, or the phenomenalist could attempt a (difficult, to say the least) truthmaking story that in turn relied on nothing unobservable.<sup>41</sup> The phenomenalist is here engaged in a distinctly anti-realist endeavor: trying to maintain truths about the supposed unobservable realm without adopting any unobservable ontology. A logical positivist, convinced that the very idea of an unobservable object is meaningless, might offer an account of what makes the unobservable portions of theories true simply by reference to observable objects and properties. Others are more cavalier. The French sociologist Bruno Latour argues that because the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II died long before the 1882 discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus, he could not have been killed by it, for the bacillus did not exist prior to its discovery (1998). Hence, Latour thinks that what makes true ‘*Mycobacterium tuberculosis* exist’ is not just the bacterial species, but an event, namely, Robert Koch’s discovery of it. As regards its truth, Latour’s view has nothing to recommend

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<sup>41</sup>Perhaps Mill (1865) would offer his “permanent possibilities of sensation” as truthmakers for claims about the unobservable. One wonders, though, whether such things are very friendly to empiricism.

it. But it is instructive as it offers a very clear competing anti-realist interpretation of what makes scientific truths true.<sup>42</sup>

As should now be clear, the metaphysical paradigm accurately locates the various views concerning scientific realism on the appropriate side of the realism/anti-realism divide. Realists are those who take on a commitment to a mind-independent unobservable reality that grounds the truth of scientific theories. Constructive empiricists maintain agnosticism with respect to such things. Because they do not embrace that reality, constructive empiricists are not realists. Other anti-realists may agree with the realists and empiricists about what would make true our scientific theories, but exchange the empiricists' agnosticism for atheism: such things do not exist, and so the theories that require them turn out to false (even if perhaps useful for other reasons). Here we make room for scientific error theorists and fictionalists (e.g., Duhem 1954).

The other anti-realist option is to offer a competing anti-realist truthmaking account for the unobservable portions of scientific theories. Philosophical consensus leans against such views nowadays, but they remain theoretical possibilities. One might defend an account where the observable realm alone makes true the parts of scientific theories that deal with the (supposedly) unobservable. Here we still have an anti-realism about the *unobservable* for the view holds that there are no unobservable entities or properties. Or one might, with the phenomenalist, resort to counterfactuals involving possible observable experiences, and take those counterfactuals to be brute (true in virtue of nothing at all). Here we again have anti-realism about the unobservable, because the counterfactuals are grounded in no reality at all, and hence no unobservable reality. Or one might offer a deeply mind-dependent account of

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<sup>42</sup>I borrow the example from Boghossian 2006a: 26, which in turn borrows it from Sokal and Bricmont 1998. See also Moore's characterization of William James on "making true" (1907-1908: 70-75).

what makes scientific theories true. We saw a gesture in that direction with Latour above. Here, we have truths—existential truths, even—made true by anti-realist (i.e., mind-dependent) things.

Given some of our earlier discussion in previous chapters, we may also consider a final anti-realist contender. So far we have been considering only those views that take the truths about the unobservable, if true, to be properly grounded. But we have been at least countenancing the possibility of ungrounded truthmaker gaps—truths that express non-discriminating propositions. On this view, the truths about the unobservable are brute and fundamental. Note that this is not the view that the fundamental constituents of reality (sub-atomic particles, say) are unobservable. Perhaps they are.<sup>43</sup> The view is that the *truths* themselves are brute or fundamental. The truth of ‘There are sub-atomic particles’ is not fundamental if it’s made true by sub-atomic particles, even if sub-atomic particles are themselves fundamental. To treat the truth of ‘There are sub-atomic particles’ as brute is to take it not to be made true by *anything at all*, including, of course, sub-atomic particles. How to even express such a view is quite difficult—it seems to hold that ‘There are sub-atomic particles’ is true, but that there aren’t any sub-atomic particles. So it looks to be true that there are sub-atomic particles, and true that there aren’t any sub-atomic particles. Azzouni appreciates the difficulty here with taking existential sentences to be non-discriminating truthmaker gaps, and thus employs new semantic resources to distinguish what there is from what there *really* is (2004, 2007).<sup>44</sup> Some such view would seem to be required by the

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<sup>43</sup>But see Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, and Collier 2007.

<sup>44</sup>Cameron, by contrast, does not seem to appreciate the difficulty here, and blatantly (though perhaps inadvertently) rejects T-sentences at will (2008c).

proponent of the brute view of truths about the unobservable, lest they fall straight into contradiction. Fully exposed, I doubt the view will attract any adherents.<sup>45</sup>

In summary, the basic picture I am painting is that what is at stake between realists and anti-realists in the philosophy of science is the kind of metaphysical commitments they take on. As before, the notion of a mind-independent reality is important here, as so many in the literature are happy to observe. Where the literature goes wrong is in too quickly identifying the notion of a mind-independent reality with a correspondence theory of truth, or with some sort of pie-in-sky noumenal realm. Realists often make the first mistake, and thus find correspondence theories more plausible than they really are.<sup>46</sup> Anti-realists often make the second mistake, and end up creating straw men for their opponents.<sup>47</sup> Recall how Putnam (e.g., 1982a) uses ‘metaphysical realism’ to pick out a theory of *truth*, indeed a correspondence account. This semantic slippage has led to an unfortunate state of affairs, namely, a philosophical climate that engages realism debates in an explicitly non-neutralist way.<sup>48</sup> I hereby take back ‘metaphysical realism’ from Putnam, and return to it its most natural meaning. Metaphysical realism is—it should have gone without saying—a

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<sup>45</sup>Cf. Kierland and Monton 2007, which takes truths about the past to be brute. For those who employ the “cheater catching” lingo, this sort of brutalist view would be a prime target. We have a gigantic body of truths to be accounted for, and are shirking it all by taking them all to be primitive.

<sup>46</sup>Horwich, admirably, is a very clear thinker on this score, and recognizes how the theory of truth need not be at issue here (1996). Few others seem to appreciate the point, and it is here that I hope to make an important contribution to the debate.

<sup>47</sup>Such are the familiar tactics of Rorty (1972), Putnam (1978, 1981), and Fine (1986). This mistake has been well diagnosed, documented, and dismissed. See, for instance, Musgrave 1989 and 1996, Newton-Smith 1989, Niiniluoto 1999, and Psillos 1999 and 2000.

<sup>48</sup>It has also led to some of the strangest and most misleading philosophical nomenclature I have ever encountered. Given how Putnam wields ‘metaphysical realism’, Horwich is forced to describe “the commonplace claim concerning some specified class of postulated entities that they really do exist” as “epistemological realism” (1982: 181). How a thesis about what *really exists* that makes no use at all of any epistemological concepts came to be labeled ‘epistemological’ is mind-boggling, and certainly offers no help at dispelling the confusions made in philosophy and elsewhere between metaphysics and epistemology. See also Larry Laudan’s use of ‘convergent epistemological realism’, which as far as I can tell involves no epistemological notion at all (1981: 21).

*metaphysical* thesis about *reality*. It is a thesis about the mind-independence of that reality, standing in stark contrast to idealism, pragmatism, verificationism, and the others. In my hands, metaphysical realism becomes a thesis about a mind-independent reality that serves to make true the truths of a domain. A domain of thought is realist when its constitutive truths depend for their truth on a mind-independent reality.<sup>49, 50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>I have not yet considered views that take a more piecemeal or “retail” approach to the question of realism even inside the philosophy of science (see Psillos 1995: 44, Cartwright 1999, and Kitcher 2001: 152). The proper attitude to take about scientific theories might be realist about some corners, and anti-realist or agnostic about others. Of course I have no objection to a more subtle approach. The metaphysical paradigm for the question of realism on offer here may be writ as large or as small as needs require. I wholly advocate a nuanced approach to the topic of realism, and there is no need—except as a presentational convenience—to limit the subtlety of one’s cognitive attitudes in the domain of scientific thought. I’ll just note that defining realism in terms of truthmakers rather than truth is a more sensible way of taking on such a subtle view, for being a “pluralist” about truthmakers is far more plausible than being a pluralist about truth (for *everything* is a truthmaker, and so the domain of truthmakers is as diverse as is your ontology).

<sup>50</sup>Perhaps, before moving on, it would be wise to consider one last theoretical position that does not fit neatly inside the three paradigms I have canvassed: Wright’s verificationist realist (1986). Wright’s realist accepts an epistemically constrained notion of truth, but holds on to the thesis that scientific truths represent the underlying structure of the world. Fine would take Wright’s verificationism as definitive of anti-realism, and van Fraassen might question whether his verificationist truths count as “literal”. I think a fair reading of Wright’s program holds that there are three potential kinds of truth: non-epistemically constrained notions, epistemically constrained notions, and deflationary notions. The first, he thinks, leads to skepticism (for all the familiar and—I would say—tired reasons). The third, he thinks, cannot hold the weight of a realism debate (or may be independently untenable, as argued in his 1992). So the second is the only game in town for realism (and here Wright goes against the grain by pairing realism and verificationism). We may get off the boat at several junctures. Truth is not at issue, so there is no blocking the debate by adopting (the right sort of) deflationism. Epistemic notions of truth are independently untenable. And, furthermore, if scientific truths are evidentially constrained, then Wright may end up with a distinctly anti-realist account of what makes scientific truths true (hence the familiar thought that verificationism and realism don’t mix). Recall that for Wright, epistemically constrained truth is superassertible truth (see section 5.2.6). Hence, ‘There are electrons’ is true if and only if ‘There are electrons’ is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information. What grounds such counterfactuals is a question never answered or even noticed. How ‘There are electrons’ gets to be warranted in some way conceptually independent of the reality of electrons or the truth of ‘There are electrons’ continues to escape me. It also escapes me how such an account can be suitably mind-independent and hence realist, given that its truth is now said to depend on our epistemic practices (which again cannot be understood in terms of some prior notion of truth). Of course, Wright is well aware of these traditional difficulties, and it is a virtue of his work that he tries to meet them. Here I have space only to register my less than optimistic attitude about the tenability of his epistemically constrained approach to truth, and to fall back on my earlier work that has sought to separate issues about metaphysics from issues about truth.

#### 6.4. Truthmaking and structural realism

Van Fraassen's new brand of empiricism was instrumental in reviving anti-realist interest in the philosophy of science. In the decades since constructive empiricism appeared on the scene, structural realism has arisen as a possible, moderate realist alternative.<sup>51</sup> Since much of the discussion over scientific realism these days centers around structural realism, it will be instructive to see how it fits into our truthmaker-based approach to the question of realism.

Structural realism, most prominently defended nowadays by John Worrall and James Ladyman, promises to offer the "best of both worlds": it claims to be able to countenance the appeal of the "no miracles" argument in favor of realism while at the same time blocking the devastating conclusions of the "pessimistic (meta)induction" argument against realism and the anti-realist arguments from radical theory change in scientific revolutions.<sup>52</sup> Structural realism maintains that despite the radical change to our scientific worldview that occurs during scientific revolutions or theory change, something at the level of structure remains constant. The structural continuity accounts for the empirical successes for which realists demand an explanation; but at the non-structural level, there can be dramatic changes as we progress through different theories, which is exactly the historical point long emphasized by anti-realists.

Worrall's favored example is that of the structural continuity in the competing theories of light of Augustin Fresnel and James Clerk Maxwell. Fresnel held a wave theory

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<sup>51</sup>But see van Fraassen 2006b and 2008 for an explicitly anti-realist structuralism about science.

<sup>52</sup>See Putnam 1975 for the no miracles argument, Laudan 1981 for the pessimistic induction, and Kuhn 1962 for his theory of scientific revolutions. The renewed interest in structural realism is due to Worrall 1989. Its intellectual heritage traces back through Russell (1927) and Herman Weyl (1950) to H. Poincaré (1952). The name seems to be due to Maxwell 1970. For defense, see Ladyman 1998 and Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, and Collier 2007. For critical discussion, see Psillos 1995 and 2001 for a realist angle, and van Fraassen 2006b for an anti-realist angle.

of light, such that light was the result of vibrations of the ether, whereas Maxwell held an electromagnetic theory of light that employs fields rather than the ether. Here is Worrall on the example:

There *was* an important element of continuity in the shift from Fresnel to Maxwell—and this was much more than a simple question of carrying over the successful *empirical* content into the new theory. At the same time it was rather less than a carrying over of the full theoretical content or full theoretical mechanisms (even in “approximate” form). And what was carried over can be captured without making the very far-fetched assumption of Hardin and Rosenberg [1982] that Fresnel’s theory was “really” about the electromagnetic field all along. There was continuity or accumulation in the shift, but the continuity is one of *form* or *structure*, not of content. In fact this claim was already made and defended by Poincaré. And Poincaré used the example of the switch from Fresnel to Maxwell to argue for a general sort of *syntactic* or *structural realism* quite different from the anti-realist instrumentalism which is often attributed to him. This largely forgotten thesis of Poincaré’s seems to me to offer the only hopeful way of *both* underwriting the ‘no miracles’ argument *and* accepting an accurate account of the extent of theory change in science. Roughly speaking, it seems right to say that Fresnel completely misidentified the *nature* of light, but nonetheless it is no miracle that his theory enjoyed the empirical predictive success that it did; it is no miracle because Fresnel’s theory, as science later saw it, attributed to light the right *structure*. (1989: 117)

Here we see clearly that the structural realist relies on a distinction between content and form, here presented as a distinction between nature and structure.<sup>53</sup> Structure is preserved through theory change; what changes with theories is our conception of the nature of that which fits into that preserved structure.

A variety of views exist within the structuralist camp. Ladyman (1998) distinguishes between metaphysical and epistemological structuralism. Epistemological structuralists argue that all that can be known about the unobservable world is its structure. Here Ladyman locates Russell (1927) and Grover Maxwell (1962, 1970). On this view:

the objective world is composed of unobservable objects between which certain properties and relations obtain; but we can only *know* the properties and relations of

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<sup>53</sup>Psillos 1995 argues that this distinction is problematical for the structural realist who seeks to use it to offer an alternative to traditional scientific realism.

these properties and relations, that is the *structure* of the objective world. (Ladyman 1998: 412).

The modest structuralist, given his epistemological scruples, claims to have evidence for the nature of that structure alone, and not for the nature of that which instantiates the structure.

Here we have the position that Stathis Psillos calls “restrictive structural realism” (2001: S18).<sup>54</sup> Our interest, of course, is in the metaphysics behind structuralism, which would seem to be the dualistic metaphysics of structure and content already presupposed by epistemological structuralism. When it comes to the metaphysics about the unobservable, structuralists distinguish between its structure, and that which instantiates that structure.

Ladyman presents the distinction as one between second-order properties and relations and first-order properties and relations, but perhaps there are other ways (see Psillos 1995). Now, the epistemological structuralists deny knowledge about what it is that instantiates the structure of the unobservable on epistemological grounds. A less modest structuralist denies knowledge on metaphysical grounds: if there is nothing else to the unobservable besides structure, then there is nothing else to be known. Here we have the “ontic structural realism” defended by Ladyman and Ross (Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, and Collier 2007: 130).<sup>55</sup>

“Structure is all there is,” as van Fraassen puts it (2006b: 280).

Given the structuralist’s distinction between structure and what fills in the structure, we can now locate the various structuralist views on our map of the realism terrain. If indeed the unobservable may be divided into its structure and its non-structure, then there will be

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<sup>54</sup>The view is known as “moderate structuralism” in van Fraassen 2006b: 280 and as “epistemic structural realism” in Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, and Collier 2007. Psillos (1995) attributes it to Worrall, but Ladyman (1998) seems to find more metaphysics in Worrall’s view.

<sup>55</sup>Psillos calls the view “eliminative structural realism” (2001: S19), whereas van Fraassen calls it “radical structuralism” (2006b: 280). Both authors doubt the coherence of the view. What is it for there to be structural relations when there is nothing else to be related? See Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, and Collier 2007 for an extensive defense of the view.

truths about both. Van Fraassen's empiricist structuralist does not draw the distinction in any ontologically distinguished way; any "knowledge of structure" that he concedes is no knowledge at all about the nature (or structure) of the unobservable. Thus, van Fraassen's structuralist, just like his constructive empiricist, takes on no commitments to the truths about the unobservable, and hence no commitments to its reality either.<sup>56</sup> The epistemic structuralist, by contrast, thinks we can add to the knowledge admitted by the empiricist. There are truths about the structure of the unobservable that science offers us. Here, in order for the view to have some content, it would be nice to have some examples of what those truths are. Then, in turn, we can explore what it is that might make those truths true.<sup>57</sup> The answer will most likely be an account of a mind-independent structure to nature, which is why the view is a species of structural *realism*.<sup>58</sup> There is a real structure to nature which is discovered by the sciences, and this structure supports the truths about it that we discover.

Finally, the ontic structuralist is a full bore realist, in the sense that science captures all there is to reality; science leaves nothing out. What distinguishes the more traditional scientific realist from the ontic structuralist is that the former believes in more: unobservable

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<sup>56</sup>My understanding of van Fraassen's structuralism is that the role of structure in scientific theorizing is limited to the role that models play in our formation of scientific theories. Hence, if I understand him correctly, van Fraassen's "structuralism" doesn't really go beyond his acceptance of the semantic (model-theoretic) conception of scientific theories (1980: 64-69). The empirical phenomena that science seeks to save are embedded into models (i.e., structures), and our "knowledge of structure" is just knowledge about these models. So I don't see van Fraassen's "new" embrace of structuralism as going beyond his original empiricism.

<sup>57</sup>A good example may be Fresnel's equations, which are front and center in Worrall's discussion (1989: 119; see also Psillos 1995: 35-39). The equations, it is claimed, are preserved across theory change, though their interpretation changes. What makes these equations true? Here we reach the deep and murky waters of what the truthmakers are for laws of nature. Any realist, structuralist or not, who accepts the truth of Fresnel's laws must eventually own up to what it is (if anything) that grounds the truth of the laws. Perhaps it is in accordance with structuralist thinking that the truthmakers for truths about structure will actually belong to the realm of the unobservable that is non-structural, and hence would be unknowable. If so, then structural realists would not be able to believe their own truthmaking accounts for the truths about structure that they accept. As theories progress, we abandon our old ideas of what grounds the truth of the theories we accept.

<sup>58</sup>Psillos observes that structural realism "admits that scientific theories are either true or false in virtue of a reality that exists independently of our theories and is not logically determined by them" (1995: 23).

structure *and* unobservable content. By contrast, the ontic structuralist argues that once science captures the structure of the unobservable, it has captured everything. So the ontic structuralist is an anti-realist about whatever else it is that realists believe in, and from which epistemic structuralists withhold judgment. In sum, ontic and epistemic structuralists are both *theists* about the structure of the unobservable; but whereas the former is an *atheist* about there being any “content” to the unobservable, the latter seems to think there is such content, but falls silent on its nature.<sup>59</sup>

Just exactly how the metaphysical paradigm fits into the literature on structural realism of course depends on how individual views are articulated. But with the paradigm in place, we can better understand a particular view (and whether and why it counts as form of realism or anti-realism) by asking what it holds true, and what it is, metaphysically speaking, that those truths depend on. Consider, for example, this bold claim, due to Ladyman and Ross: “There are no things. Structure is all there is” (Ladyman, Ross, Spurrett, and Collier 2007: 130). This monist metaphysical view obviously must deny the truth of any statement requiring the existence of objects (i.e., things), and must fight the uphill battle of relying on structure alone to ground the truth of the truths about the world. But so long as that structure is mind-independent, we will have a kind of realism, at least about structure. (Presumably the view is thoroughly anti-realist and error-theoretic about *things*.) Other views that subscribe to there being more than just structure can use those things as truthmakers; presumably, the epistemic structuralist’s revulsion to ontic structuralism can be understood in part as bafflement about how structure alone could provide sufficient ontological grounds for all that which we take to be true of the world. Even if we cannot know about unobservable things,

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<sup>59</sup>Here we seem to have a view parallel to Demea’s and Philo’s in Hume’s *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. God is said to exist, but we are unable to say anything about his nature. Here we have a kind of theism about God’s existence mixed with agnosticism about his nature.

the instinct of the epistemic structural realist is that there must at least be such things.

Otherwise, too many of the truths we learn from science will go ungrounded.

All told, the topic of structural realism fits well within our metaphysical paradigm for exploring the question of scientific realism, for its metaphysical interests are readily visible. The distinction between structure (form) and nature (content) is ontological in nature, and the various views diverge with respect to whether everything there is to the unobservable falls to one side, or with whether both sides are (possibly) populated. The ontic structuralist takes the former path, arguing that structure is all there is, and that science gives us knowledge about it. The epistemic structuralist is more cautious, and presumably believes in an unobservable nature to things, though that nature is forever beyond our epistemic reach. Both sides grant the truth to claims about the structure of the unobservable realm, and in so doing oblige themselves to offer a distinctly metaphysical account of what it is that underpins those truths. The ontic structuralist here may resort to structure and structure alone, whereas the epistemic structuralist may have to plead ignorance, if, for example, the truthmakers for claims about the unobservable structure turn out to be part of the nature of the unobservable. Of course, if one is unwilling to acknowledge the reality of a realm of truthmakers, one should be hesitant to commit to the truth of truths that one suspects are made true by them (and them alone).<sup>60</sup> I am not sure how actual structuralists might approach these truthmaking questions, but I hope that at least I have presented them clearly, and shown why it is important for theorists to consider and, ultimately, answer them.

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<sup>60</sup>To illustrate, imagine someone who, like Mackie, thought that moral judgments could only be made true by something like Platonic forms. It would be highly cognitively tenuous to continue upholding the truth of moral claims while remaining agnostic about the forms.

## 6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that we can reach a better understanding of what is at stake in the debate over scientific realism by viewing it through the lens of truthmaker theory. The positive results were as follows. First, we saw how Fine's characterization of the realism debate puts all the theoretical weight on the theory of truth, which is a weight it cannot and should not have to bear. Fine's interest in truth is misplaced; what his non-realist really needs to do is not abandon the theory of truth, but the theory of truthmaking. Once this correction is in place, though, Fine's favored position becomes far less attractive. Second, while seeing how van Fraassen's epistemological interests in the debate ultimately run orthogonal to our more metaphysical concerns, we have seen how his account of realism and anti-realism can benefit from shedding the linguistic notion of "literal truth" and adopting instead the position that the realist believes in realism-indicative truthmakers. This characterization is thoroughly metaphysical, and abandons the last vestige of semantics in van Fraassen's account. Finally, we articulated a thoroughly metaphysical understanding of what is at stake in scientific realism, and applied that understanding to the now thriving debate over structural realism. Perhaps my account can go some way at convincing those who are skeptical (e.g., Blackburn 2002b) that the realism debate in the philosophy of science is live and well.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>I imagine that some of the figures I have here engaged—in particular van Fraassen and Ladyman—will be unmoved by the thought that their philosophy of science will be helpfully supplemented by my discussion of truthmaking. Both philosophers are highly skeptical of the significance of such "metaphysical" inquiry (where 'metaphysical' is taken to be a derogatory term). I maintain that my concern for truthmaking is the result of trying to come to terms with the notion of ontological grounding, which I believe to be a basic and familiar notion, so much so that it finds its way into the discussion without anyone noticing. (For instance, Fine seems to be thinking about truthmaking all the time, though he articulates these thoughts in terms of correspondence theory. Van Fraassen must also have some realist sense of truthmaking in mind; if not, it would be baffling why he sees realism inside his characterization of realism.) In a sense, I don't think we need to add truthmaking to the discussion of scientific realism—it's already there, implicit in the practice. That van Fraassen is suspicious of any metaphysics incompatible with nominalism is fine as far as my project is concerned. The nominalist has a place in the truthmaking framework; he is a brother metaphysician. On the nominalist's view, all truths are grounded in particular, non-abstract (in the "Harvard" sense) objects. Ladyman would be suspicious of any metaphysical labor being performed by metaphysicians that goes beyond what is performed by physicists and

Though we cannot explore such topics now, there remain plenty of fruitful avenues for truthmaking research in the philosophy of science. Philosophers of science are engaged in a number of important metaphysical investigations, many of which could be aided by some clear-headed thinking about the nature of truthmaking. Here I have in mind topics such as the laws of nature, causation, dispositions, counterfactuals, and chance. What, for example, is it in the world that makes the laws of nature true? Perhaps it is second-order relations between universals (Dretske 1977, Tooley 1977, Armstrong 1983). Perhaps the laws are discriminating truthmaker gaps that supervene on the Humean mosaic of facts (Lewis 1973). Perhaps the laws are made true by the truth of certain brute counterfactuals (Lange 2009). Tim Maudlin takes the laws themselves (or, perhaps better, the “lawmakers”) to be brute (2007; cf. Carroll 1994).<sup>62</sup> Again, these views are all familiar, and can be argued for and against independently of any explicit attention to truthmaker theory. However, one of my overall proposals is that thinking about truthmakers is a useful way of understanding and regimenting metaphysical debates. Truthmaker theory can help us understand a little better just what the debate is about when it comes to, say, the laws of nature, and where it is their truth (or, moreover, their lawhood) comes from.<sup>63</sup> Similar remarks can be made for causation (What makes it true that C causes E?), counterfactuals (What makes it true that if I were to release this pen, it would fall to the floor?), dispositions (What makes it true that glass is brittle?), and chance (What makes it true that the half-life of this atom is what it is?). Ideas

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philosophers of physics. So be it. On his view, we can understand the proper ontological grounds for truth by attending to physics and physics alone. His is a view about how we should go about accounting for what makes our theories true, not a rejection of the enterprise.

<sup>62</sup>Maudlin thinks of laws as entities (to be contrasted with statements of law), and that they are metaphysically primitive (brute, fundamental): “I suggest we accept laws as fundamental entities in our ontology” (2007: 18). The distinction between laws thought of as things that *are* true versus as things that *make* true is just one example of an idea that can be more adroitly handled with an eye toward truthmaker theory.

<sup>63</sup>Note that Tooley 1977 and Carroll 1987 employ the language of truthmaking. See also the suggestive title of Lange 2009.

about truthmaking are alive and well when it comes to these topics, even when they are not fully explicit. (They certainly are explicit in Armstrong's discussion of them, particularly in his 1997 and 2004.) It is my contention, shared by Armstrong, that we can approach these topics in the philosophy of science more thoughtfully and precisely when we are equipped with a sophisticated theory of truthmaking.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have tried to accomplish three distinct tasks. I have put forward a novel approach to truthmaker theory, and then put that approach to work by helping further the debates regarding the nature of truth and realism. My approach to truthmaking is distinguished from the others in the literature on two counts. First, I advocate a notion of truthmaking that applies only to synthetic truths; I think the notion of an analytic truth is such that its truth is nowise grounded in the nature of the world. The truth of analyticities does not depend on the things that exist, and the properties they have. Second, rather than starting with a particular doctrine about which truths have truthmakers, I have adopted a more methodological approach to truthmaking. Instead of assuming that all truths (even all synthetic truths) have truthmakers, I suggest that we proceed on the assumption that truths have truthmakers, and pull back from that assumption if the individual case warrants it. As such, my account of truthmaking has a degree of flexibility unavailable to other approaches; it also enables the possibility of offering ontological grounds for truths that may not have truthmakers. As I hope to have shown, embracing the existence of truthmaker gaps is not yet any compromise to the most important insights underlying truthmaker theory.

Having developed my approach to truthmaker theory, I then attempted to identify, diagnose, and put to rest one of the most pervasive and pernicious assumptions held by many in the literature on truthmaking (and by many outside it). That is the assumption that truthmaker theory is a theory about the nature of truth, or even a kind of correspondence theory of truth. This conflation is understandable, for one way of understanding

correspondence theories is as trying to combine an account of the nature of truth with a (rather flat-footed) account of truthmakers. But these tasks may be separated, and contemporary accounts of truthmaking cannot be understood as theories of truth. As a result, truthmaker theory is fully consistent with deflationary theories of truth, and serves to undermine correspondence theories of truth by doing their job even better. The fundamental insight that has led many to think that correspondence is the natural, correct view of truth—that truths depend upon the world—is far better served by a sophisticated theory of truthmaking.

Getting clear on the relationship between truth and truthmaking was crucial for the subsequent discussion of the nature of realism, for realism has often been understood in terms of truth. But realism debates are better understood in terms of truthmaking rather than truth. Realism involves taking truths to be grounded in realism-relevant reality, where what counts as being relevant to realism may vary from domain to domain; one abandons realism by abandoning the relevant truths, or taking those truths to be grounded in something less—something mind-dependent, say, or perhaps nothing at all.

With the truthmaking paradigm to realism in place, we saw that, when it comes to the metaethical question of realism, quasi-realists have the best story in town. When it comes to the question of scientific realism, we saw how framing the issue in terms of truthmaking brings out how other approaches to scientific realism are fundamentally flawed. Much of the action in the realism debate in the philosophy of science turns on epistemic arguments on which we have remained neutral; that we haven't advanced the argument supports our framing of the issue, however, for it simply reflects the near universal consensus about what ontological story we should believe to ground our best theories, if indeed we should choose

to believe those theories. The remaining live debate between scientific realists and structural realists easily fits into our mold.

Those familiar with the truthmaking industry will have noticed a sizable lacuna with respect to some of those topics that are the bread and butter of truthmaker theory. Do negative truths require truthmakers? Are states of affairs or tropes required for truthmaker theory, or can we make do with less? These topics are well covered, and I admit that I do not have any particularly novel contribution to add to the discussion of such questions at this time. I have expressed my sympathy with Lewis's (2001b) approach to truthmaking that frees us from finding truthmakers for predications and negatives (or, alternatively, using objects under counterpart relations as truthmakers for such truths), but I have not argued for the superiority of his view over those of other theorists such as Armstrong, Lowe, and Schaffer. (Or for its superiority over the view of the Lewis of Lewis 2003 for that matter!)

Further work is, of course, needed, and I here register my hope that our extensive methodological explorations can at least contribute to the project of answering the more basic truthmaking questions that I have set aside for present purposes. For one thing, we were led, in conjunction with the potentially paradoxical Milne sentences to reconsidering whether truthmaker theory had anything to say regarding analytic truth. This topic—crucial to understanding how wide the scope of truthmaking is—deserves much more investigation than the preliminary pages I have contributed.

In attempting to extend truthmaker theory to new philosophical territory, I have of course had to limit the scope of the topics I discuss. I chose to tackle the realism debates in metaethics and the philosophy of science, but the general approach could be carried over to the philosophy of math, logic, modality, and aesthetics. Some of these topics are more

heavily covered by truthmaker theorists than others—math and modality have received substantial coverage from Armstrong (1989a, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2007), but the truths of logic and aesthetics have received scant attention. Such topics—as well as the topics relevant to the philosophy of science that I adumbrated in the conclusion to the last chapter—deserve further truthmaking treatment.

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