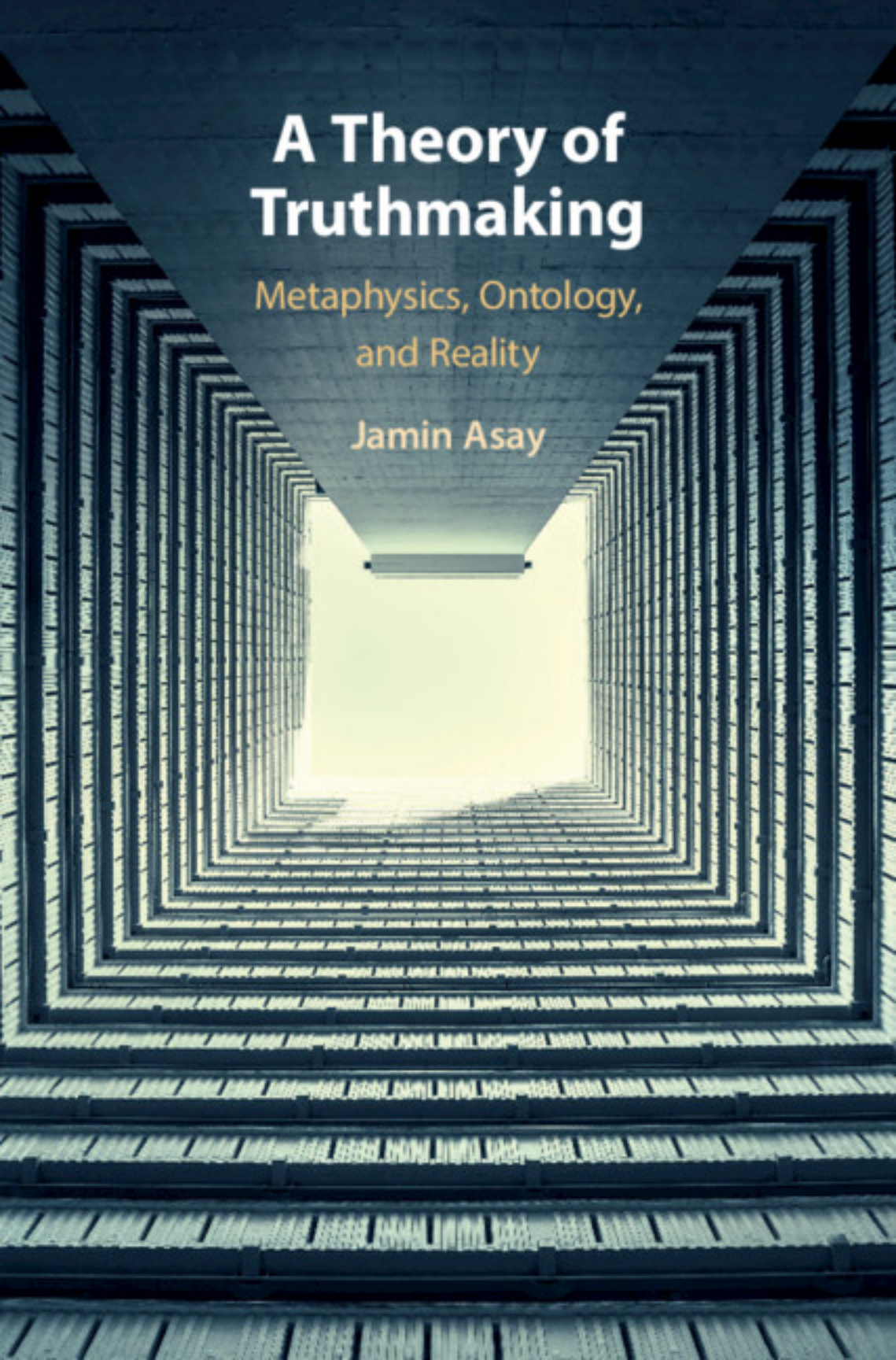

A Theory of Truthmaking
Metaphysics, Ontology, and Reality
Jamin Asay

A THEORY OF TRUTHMAKING

The theory of truthmaking has long aroused skepticism from philosophers who believe it to be tangled up in contentious ontological commitments and unnecessary theoretical baggage. In this book, Jamin Asay shows why that suspicion is unfounded. Challenging the current orthodoxy that truthmaking's fundamental purpose is to be a tool for explaining why truths are true, Asay revives the conception of truthmaking as fundamentally an exercise in ontology: a means for coordinating one's beliefs about what is true and one's ontological commitments. He goes on to show how truthmaking connects to analyticity, truth, and realism, and how it contributes to debates over nominalism, presentism, mathematical objects, and fictional characters. His book is the most comprehensive exploration to date into what truthmaking is and how it contributes to metaphysical debates across philosophy, and will interest a wide range of readers in metaphysics and beyond.

JAMIN ASAY is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong. He is the author of *The Primitivist Theory of Truth* (Cambridge, 2013) and numerous articles on truth, truthmaking, and realism.

A THEORY OF TRUTHMAKING

Metaphysics, Ontology, and Reality

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For Charlie and Sid

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Preface

From the time I first began studying the theory of truthmaking, over ten years ago now, I have been struck by just how many philosophers are suspicious of it. The distrust, I've gathered, boils down to its association with realist metaphysics – overzealously realist metaphysics, in the eyes of the critics. My graduate programs were more than hospitable to the antirealist and nominalist ideas found in Hume, Carnap, Quine, and Dummett, and expressivism was widely and positively discussed. Even as I spent a semester studying in Australia – supposedly as safe a place for realist metaphysics as one can find – I found myself in Sydney, where Huw Price had taken up the Challis Professorship of Philosophy, previously held for decades by David Armstrong. In one way or another, all my work on truthmaking addresses this antecedent skepticism. What is the best way to utilize the notion of truthmaking that can prove fruitful in ontological investigation, and yet be available to philosophers with a diverse set of background metaphysical commitments?

This book presents my attempt to find the right balance between realist and antirealist metaphysical perspectives, and how truthmaker theory is a useful tool for discovering it. In the preface to my earlier book on the nature of truth, I noted the importance of separating the conceptual investigation into the nature of our concept of truth from the metaphysical investigation of what makes truths true. The earlier volume speaks to the first project; the present volume speaks to the latter.

As this monograph has been over ten years in the making, I am indebted to a great number of individuals and institutions that have aided me along the way. The Research Grants Council of Hong Kong awarded me an Early Career Scheme grant (HKU 23400014) that provided time for me to write and funds for traveling to present my research in a number of venues around the world. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Hong Kong funded a workshop that I organized around the manuscript. My thanks go to Sam Baron, Ray Briggs, Max Deutsch, Tom Donaldson, Joe Lau, and

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Ideas found in the text have been presented in various forms at the Australasian Association of Philosophy Conference, North Carolina Philosophical Society Annual Meeting, Midsouth Philosophy Conference, Ohio Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, Taiwan Philosophical Logic Colloquium, Korean Society for Analytic Philosophy, Pluralisms Global Research Network Workshop, and the Explanaza workshop hosted by the University of Western Australia, as well as to the philosophy departments at the University of Sydney, Oklahoma State University, University of Oxford, University of Minnesota Duluth, National University of Singapore, University of Aberdeen, University of Hong Kong, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Yale-NUS College. My thanks go to all these many audiences for their lively discussions and constructive feedback.

Portions of Chapter 6 are largely taken from "Truthmakers against Correspondence," to be published in *Grazer Philosophische Studien*. I thank Brill for permission to publish here. Chapter 7 is largely taken from my paper "Truth(making) by Convention," to be published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*. I thank the University of Illinois Press for permission to publish here.

Countless friends and colleagues have discussed and debated these ideas with me over the years. For that support, I'd like to thank Andrew Bailey, Derek Baker, Simon Blackburn, Ben Blumson, Seth Bordner, Jason Bowers, David Braddon-Mitchell, Ray Briggs, Matthew Carlson, Mark Colyvan, Patrick Connolly, Adam Cureton, Felipe De Brigard, Max Deutsch, Douglas Edwards, Katie Elliott, Pete Evans, Dana Falkenberg, Alison Fernandes, Elizabeth Foreman, Chris Fraser, Dimitria Gatzia, Emily Given, Patrick Greenough, Matthew Hammerton, Thomas Hofweber, Mark Jago, Carrie Jenkins, Drew Johnson, Michael Johnson, Emily Kelahan, Matt Kotzen, Dave Landy, Marc Lange, Joe Lau, Ian Lawson, Cathay Liu, Paisley Livingston, Bill Lycan, Raamy Majeed, Nick Malpas, Kristie Miller, Clair Morrissey, Jenny Nado, Shyam Nair, Alan Nelson, Ram Neta, Laurie Paul, Nikolaj Pedersen, Michael Pendlebury, Jamaal Pitt, Huw Price, Mike Resnik, Dave Ripley, John Roberts, Darrell Rowbottom, Andrea Sauchelli, Frank Saunders, Geoff Sayre-McCord, Jonathan Schaffer, Nate Sharadin, Mat Simpson, Tuomas Tahko, Jonathan Tallant, Elanor Taylor, Kelly Trogdon, Piers Norris Turner, Jo Wolff, Jeremy Wyatt, and Syraya Chin-mu Yang, with apologies to anyone I have left out.

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Keith Simmons and Dorit Bar-On deserve special recognition for their ongoing friendship and support, and for inviting me to the University of Connecticut to discuss my work during their graduate seminar. They are exemplary models of how to do logically rigorous and empirically informed philosophy.

My thanks again go to Hilary Gaskin and the team at Cambridge for their support of the project and swift, expert editorial guidance. Thanks also go to the external reviewers of the manuscript; their extensive comments have greatly improved the book.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my partner Emily Matchar and our sons Charlie and Sid. They have undoubtedly made it true that the experience of writing this book has been a rewarding and fulfilling one. I couldn't have asked for a better source of love and support.

Introduction
A Manifesto for Truthmaking

Truth depends on reality. When something is true, its truth depends upon the world. Its truth is not some brute, inexplicable feature of reality. Truths are true in virtue of reality, and not vice versa.

These ideas are the source of the philosophical enterprise known as *truthmaker theory*. Truthmaker theorists, accordingly, are philosophers who explore the domain of metaphysics by using the tools of truthmaker theory. Explaining what those tools are, and how they are best put to use, are the main goals of this monograph. It is my contention that thinking clearly about truthmaking can lead to progress in metaphysics: it helps us dispense with a variety of erroneous ways of reasoning about truth and ontology, and correctly calls our attention to ontological issues that deserve to be addressed.

Now, it is not just self-identified truthmaker theorists who agree with the theses with which I began. (Nor do all truthmaker theorists agree on how they are to be interpreted.) But it is truthmaker theorists who think that those ideas are particularly useful in advancing metaphysical debate. Many philosophers, nevertheless, have remained unconvinced of the prospects for truthmaker theory, and are dismissive of the enterprise. My hope for these pages is that such skepticism can be assuaged by thinking about truthmakers in the manner I offer. I suspect that many philosophers have rejected truthmaker theory because of its close associations with certain controversial metaphysical views, or because they think its basic ambitions can be achieved by much more modest means. In the chapters that follow, I offer an attractive approach to truthmaker theory that is not front-loaded with the heavy theoretical assumptions and commitments that many take it to involve, and address the charge that truthmaker theory is an overreaction to a simple ontological impulse. While truthmaker theory is no metaphysical magic bullet, I do believe that its questions are fruitful ones that deserve our attention. Furthermore, as I shall argue, plenty of thinking

about truthmaking can already be found in ordinary philosophical theorizing, though not always under that description.

In this introduction, then, my goal is to defend the claim that truthmakers are worth caring about, and to identify some of the core motivations that drive the project. In subsequent chapters, I turn to my development of truthmaker theory, and how a proper truthmaking methodology should be constructed. Then I put that methodology to work to prove its utility to metaphysics and philosophy more broadly. But first, let's consider why we should care about truthmaking at all.

0.1 Why Care about Truthmakers?

Let's take a closer look at the cherished theses of truthmaker theory with which I began. As will become clear, how to interpret them is multiply contentious. But regardless of the details, they are quite plausible, and capture some fundamental ways of thinking about truth and metaphysics. Anyone who likewise finds them appealing ought to give truthmakers a chance. One central claim is that *truth depends on reality, but not vice versa*. What these words express is that there is an asymmetric priority to be found between two different things. On the one hand, there are sentences, beliefs, propositions, and the like (i.e., *truth-bearers*) being true. My belief that penguins are flightless birds is true, as is the sentence "England is west of Belgium." On the other hand, there are things that exist in the world: penguins and their vestigial wings, and England and Belgium together with their geographic relationships to one another. To say that truth depends on reality is to say something along the lines of: my belief that penguins are flightless birds is true because of the existence of the penguins themselves and their vestigial wings. But it doesn't work the other way around: the penguins don't exist *because* my belief is true. The penguins and their features come "first"; their existence explains, grounds, or accounts for the truth of my belief. Everyone can agree that if penguins exist as they do, my belief is true, and that if my belief is true, then the penguins exist as they do. But this material equivalence fails to express the asymmetry that exists between these two separate matters.

What I am addressing here is a "Euthyphro contrast," named for Plato's famous dialogue (Plato 1997). To say that two things always (and even perhaps necessarily) accompany one another is not to say that one does or doesn't account for the other, or that the two are equally fundamental. Everything that God tolerates may be everything that is morally permissible, but it doesn't follow that actions are morally permissible because

God tolerates them. It may instead be the case that God tolerates them because they are morally permissible. Correlation, to put it simply, is not causation. Aristotle detects the asymmetry between truth and being in his *Categories*:

> For that a man is reciprocates in implication of being with the true statement about him (for if a man is, the statement by which we say that a man is is true; and it reciprocates, since if the statement by which we say that a man is is true, then the man is). 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. (Aristotle 1995: 11–12, 14b14–22)[1]

Put into the language of truthmaking (which typically abandons a causal understanding of the dependence in question),[2] Aristotle's claim is that statements are true in virtue of the existence of their truthmakers, but it's not the case that those truthmakers exist because the statements in question are true.

So far I have focused on the asymmetry between truth and being: one takes priority over the other in our thinking about them. One goal of truthmaker theory is to better understand the nature of that asymmetric relationship. But perhaps an even more important goal is determining what actually stands in the relationship. Given that truth depends on reality, there must be the right kind of reality to properly ground what we take to be true. As a result, which things are true has implications for *ontology*, the discovery of what exists in reality. These implications impose restrictions on what I'll be referring to as our "cognitive accounting." On the one hand, we have various beliefs about the world; these beliefs constitute our worldview by giving an exhaustive account of what we take to be true. On the other hand, we maintain an ontology: we commit only to certain things existing in reality. To borrow a metaphor, we each have a "belief box" that contains all the things we believe, and an "ontological inventory" that lists all of our ontological commitments. Truthmaker theory offers the admonition to keep these two dimensions of our cognitive lives in harmony. One should not add something to or subtract something from one's belief box without also appropriately updating one's ontological inventory. What truthmaker theory offers is a constant reminder to consider the ontological implications that are imposed on us

[1] See also Aristotle 1966: 158, 1051b:6–7. [2] But see Wilson 2018.

by our beliefs. In this way, truthmaker theory aspires to ontological honesty: it keeps us ever cognizant of the kind of ontology our best theories of the world commit us to.

It might be thought that the concept of an ontological inventory can simply be reduced to one corner of our belief box. There's nothing more to Venus, say, being on my ontological inventory than <Venus exists> being in my belief box.[3] However, I think that it is useful to distinguish the two. The main reason is that it's not at all obvious which members of my belief box constitute my ontological inventory. Suppose I am ontologically committed to penguins. Which belief expresses this commitment? Perhaps the obvious choice from my belief box would be <There are penguins>. However, this choice is not mandatory. It is, famously, the choice that Quine makes in "On What There Is" (1948). But Quine later revised his view, arguing that ontological commitments can only be read off the quantified statements of our chosen theories once they're regimented into first-order logic; the sentences of natural language don't, for Quine, express ontological commitments (1960). Jody Azzouni has argued that *no* sentence in natural language expresses ontological commitments (2007), and has independently challenged Quine's quantifier-based view (Azzouni 2004). Thomas Hofweber (2005) argues that quantified sentences in natural language are ambiguous between two readings, only one of which is ontologically committing. The question of which of our beliefs actually represent our ontological commitments is one taken up by the theory of ontological commitment itself, which is not my present project.[4] However our ontological commitments are expressed, we definitely take them on (*pace* Carnap 1950). Truthmaker theorists believe that we can advantageously develop our ontological inventories by thinking clearly about truthmakers, and are suspicious of those who give too little attention to ontological questions.

To take a case in point, consider the many, many theories that employ possible worlds as a theoretical device. The use of possible worlds in developing various theories (of meaning, propositions, etc.) is so widespread that one might take their invocation to be completely innocuous. It's not uncommon, for instance, to see someone make use of possible worlds, but quickly add that such things are a mere *façon de parler*, and not

[3] The expression "<*p*>" most commonly abbreviates "the proposition that *p*." In the interest of ontological neutrality, I use "<*p*>" to refer to any truth-bearer whose content is given by "*p*" (or *is* the content that *p*), unless context makes it clear otherwise. I discuss truth-bearers more fully in Section 1.2.

[4] I discuss the matter in more detail in Section 2.3.

to be associated with the very ontologically real concrete possible worlds of David Lewis (1986).[5] Such quick maneuvers do not pass the critical scrutiny of truthmaker theorists, however. If possible worlds are an important theoretical component of one's view, then one owes an account of how there can be such important truths that rely upon them. Lewis himself passes this test admirably: because he commits to an ontology of possible worlds, he can freely make use of them in his theory-building. For those other philosophers who make repeated use of them but refrain from acknowledging their existence, truthmaker theorists become a kind of ontological gadfly, inquiring as to how a mere way of speaking can bear such a heavy theoretical burden.[6]

In summary, truthmaker theory tells us that truth depends on reality, and counsels us to consider what needs to belong to reality in order to provide the proper grounds for all of that truth. As a result, truthmaker theory offers the imperative to be honest and thorough in one's ontological accounting. Truth abhors a vacuum. So what does it revere? Truthmaker theorists suggest that we wear our ontological commitments on our sleeves. By doing so, we not only further the goals of ontological inquiry, but also make transparent one crucial dimension for making judgments about metaphysical theory choice. The requisite ontology for a given theory is a crucial factor in determining its plausibility and acceptability. Asking after truthmakers is a means for keeping our ontological books well managed. Anyone interested in developing theories with precisely articulated ontological commitments ought to take truthmaking seriously.

There is one grander objective that some might seek after in the idea of truthmaking, and that is to discover the true and most fundamental nature of reality. Truthmaking may seem to be a competitor with other prominent metaphysical views currently in vogue. Consider the systems developed by Fine (2001), Sider (2011), and Williamson (2013). These views purport to offer a metaphysics that accounts for the genuine structure of reality, and their defenders are keen to argue for their superiority to truthmaker theory.[7] It is not obvious to me, however, that these

[5] E.g., Nozick 1981: 681, n. 8, and Yalcin 2007. I did this myself in my dissertation.

[6] Cf. Divers: "The use of PW [possible-world discourse] is available to any philosopher. But when the chips are down, we want to know exactly what the talk is supposed to mean and exactly what kind of application the discourse, so interpreted, is supposed to afford. Unless both of these questions are answered, one who invokes PW achieves nothing of any philosophical substance" (2002: 16; cf. Heil 2012: 169). Melia's "weasel nominalism" about mathematics might be another case of refusing to acknowledge the ontological commitments of one's assertions (2000).

[7] See, e.g., Sider 2011: 153–161, Fine 2012: 43–46, and Williamson 2013: 391–403. I rebut Fine's arguments in Asay 2017, and Williamson's in Asay 2016b. See also Sections 5.1 and 5.2.

philosophers are genuine opponents. Whether or not truthmaking captures the fundamental structure of reality is not a question I address, or really even understand. I do believe that thinking about truthmaking can lead to productive inquiry into metaphysics, and help remove a fair amount of muddled reasoning that regularly appears when the topics of truth and ontology are on the table. I do maintain, alongside all truthmaker theorists, that truth depends on reality, but not vice versa. Whether this claim reflects some prior metaphysical fact about the genuine structure of reality, or simply a deeply entrenched fact about the way many of us conceive of the relationship between truth and reality, is not ultimately my concern. The thought that being is prior to truth has a long history – it's present already in Aristotle – and its continuing appeal is sufficient to justify serious inquiry into the idea of truthmaking. Those who deny it (if there are any) also betray a fundamental dimension of their thinking about the relationship between truth and ontology that is worth exploring. True or not, and capturing some fundamental metaphysical fact or not, the truthmaking theses merit thoughtful investigation.

This project, then, should be understood as having relatively modest ambitions. P. F. Strawson has famously drawn a useful distinction between *descriptive* and *revisionary* metaphysics. The former "is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world," while the latter "is concerned to produce a better structure" (1959: 9). Sider, Fine, and Williamson are best understood as pursuing a third option, one that might have seemed too optimistic for mid-century Anglophone philosophy: discovering the actual structure of the world, regardless of its implications for how we actually structure our thought. My ambitions are squarely descriptive, however. Many of us are naturally inclined to find a kind of dependence between truth and being; for those who share this disposition, I offer my account as the best way of understanding it, and show what implications we should draw from it. Regardless of whether or not truthmaking reveals the fundamental structure of reality, it does reveal a fundamental aspect of how we think about truth and reality.

0.2 What Truthmakers Can Do for You

Like any good philosophical theory, truthmaker theory must earn its keep by demonstrating the theoretical virtues it has to offer. Beyond its core ambitions of understanding the relationship between truth and reality and providing credible ontological inventories, truthmaker theory also has much to contribute to topics of metaphysical concern that crop up in

nearly every corner of philosophy. In this section, I highlight a number of ways that nuanced thinking about truthmaking can illuminate other topics of philosophical interest.

One source of utility found in truthmaker theory is its ability to capture and articulate a variety of extant arguments and objections that appear all across the philosophical landscape. My contention, in other words, is that truthmaking is *already* at play in many philosophical discussions. Truthmaker theory can contribute to those discussions by articulating what is at stake in them, and showing how they are unified in purpose in what are perhaps surprising ways.

Take, for instance, the topic of personal identity. Suppose you undergo a split-brain operation, with each half of your brain transplanted to a unique, new body (or any other kind of "fission" operation). Are you identical to the person in new body A, or to the person in new body B? While it is logically coherent to select one of these options, there seems to be no reason to choose one over the other. More to the point, there doesn't appear to be anything to make it true that you're identical with A, rather than B (or vice versa). As Derek Parfit wonders about such a view: "What can make me one of them rather than the other?" (1971: 5). This is a metaphysical objection to the idea that you could be identical to just one of the candidates: such a view supposes that it's true that you're identical to A (or B), but has no plausible ontological answer to the question of what makes that supposed fact[8] true. The complaint is thus not simply epistemological, that there's no evidence that favors the A hypothesis over the B hypothesis. Rather, the charge is that nothing in reality can account for you being identical to one but not the other. Yet there must be some such ground, if it's to be true that the identity holds. So neither identity obtains. This line of thought is truthmaker theory in action, though it is not generally represented that way.

Sometimes the idea of truthmaking appears in epistemological contexts. In fact, it plays a starring role in the most famous epistemological context: Gettier's counterexamples to the justified true belief analysis of knowledge (1963). Smith has a justified belief that Jones has ten coins in his pocket and will get the job for which they are both applicants. Smith thus infers

[8] "Fact" is a troublesome word in truthmaking contexts. In short, "fact" is often used in a *truthmaking* sense (as in Russell and Wittgenstein), to refer to objects that make things true, and in a *truth-bearing* sense, to refer to things that are true. Both uses are legitimate, and not in conflict or competition with one another. The existence of the former (but not the latter) is metaphysically contentious, and I make no assumptions about their reality. As with the above sentence, which sense of "fact" is at play will easily be discernible from the context.

that the proposition <The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket> is true. This turns out to be a justified true belief, but it's true because Smith himself will get the job (and unknowingly happens to have ten coins in his own pocket, too). Gettier argues that Smith does not know the proposition in question because it "is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in [this proposition] on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket" (1963: 122). Gettier's argument here assumes a principle to the effect that to know a proposition, one must be appropriately related to the states of the world that make that proposition true. (This principle later becomes the centerpiece of Goldman's (1967) causal theory of knowledge.)[9]

Another example involves epistemicism about vagueness (e.g., Williamson 1994). According to the epistemicist, vagueness is fundamentally an epistemological phenomenon. There is a fact of the matter regarding where the line is drawn between, say, the rich and the poor, although this fact is generally unknowable. According to the epistemicist, then, some claim of the form "Exactly *x* amount of dollars is minimally sufficient for being rich" is true. What many find intolerable about epistemicism is how such a claim could be true when similar claims where *x* is a penny more or a penny less are false (cf. Eklund 2011: 357). As in the case of personal identity, a sense of metaphysical arbitrariness is easily detected. Truthmaker theorists express this sort of reservation by charging that no plausible truthmaker can be found to fund epistemicism's unique commitment to such truths.[10]

A related form of argument has motivated truthmaker theory from the beginning. David Armstrong, who has done more than anyone else to popularize the idea of truthmaking, has long credited Charlie Martin with the following kind of argument (Armstrong 1989a: 8–9, 1991: 191, 1993: 430, 2004: 1–3). Certain philosophical views commit to the truth of various claims; many commit, in particular, to the truth of certain counterfactuals. A phenomenalist in the tradition of Berkeley, for example, may assert that there is nothing more than actual sense data, and that the

[9] My interests going forward will focus on metaphysics, not epistemology. But there is an ongoing literature that connects truthmaking to epistemological issues. See, e.g., Jacquette 1996, Hetherington 2005, Heathcote 2006, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, and 2015, Bernecker 2011, Biro 2013 and 2014, Giordani 2013 and 2015, and Vance 2014.

[10] I raise a parallel objection to epistemicist solutions to the liar paradox in Asay 2015. A similar line of thought seems to drive Kripke's meaning skeptic, who looks for some fact that could make it true that we express PLUS rather than QUUS by "plus" (Kripke 1982).

objects of our experience are to be understood as combinations or constructions of those data. When questioned as to whether things could exist unobserved, such as a crater on the far side of the moon, a phenomenalist may contend that our suspicion that such things exist (which cannot be true, by the phenomenalist's lights) is best accounted for by our commitment to truths such as <If you were to be on the moon at a certain time and location, you would have a crater-like sense impression>, which is not committed to the existence of unobserved entities. And indeed, this counterfactual may be true. But what accounts for its truth? Why is this counterfactual true rather than false? The realist who has no ontological qualms about unobserved craters has the beginnings of an answer: the counterfactual is true, at least in part, in virtue of the existence of the crater. Phenomenalists have no such option available, given that their ontology is limited to the set of actual sense impressions. Armstrong detects similar strategies at work in behaviorism about mental states, and operationalism about quantities (1989a: 10). David Lewis contends that the same sort of argument can be wielded against presentists (which I take up in Chapter 10), and those who take the distinction between law-governed and accidental regularities to be primitive (Lewis 1992: 219). Here we see the truthmaker theorist's call for honest accounting come into play. It's not just what we believe that makes our theories tolerable; also relevant is the sort of ontology that is needed to ground the truths of those theories.

Other views that rely on counterfactuals face similar challenges. Take, for instance, Crispin Wright's metaethical view (1992, 1995; see also Lynch 2009, chapter 8). For Wright, what it is for a moral judgment to be true is for it to be *superassertible*, which it achieves when it is "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). Wright's hope is that the superassertibility account of moral truth allows one to dodge commitments to the moral facts and properties peddled by moral realists; he's interested in developing an antirealist approach to ethics that nevertheless preserves the existence of moral truth. Suppose it's true that it's morally wrong to eat animals. Then, on Wright's view, the belief that it's morally wrong to eat animals is warranted, and its warrant would survive in the face of any improvement to our cognitive state. Wright is then hopeful that a fruitful account of warrant is in the offing (one which, it's important to note, cannot in any way presuppose the notion of truth, which is what's currently being analyzed). Because this account makes no reference to

any metaphysics of morals, and analyzes moral judgment by way of an epistemically constrained notion of truth, Wright takes himself to be offering an antirealist alternative in metaethics. But like the phenomenalists, behaviorists, and operationalists before him, Wright has taken flight to counterfactuals. For my moral judgments to be true, they would have to remain warranted after all further positive inquiry. But what makes them remain so warranted? If eating animals is wrong, then that judgment's warrant would survive in the face of any improvement to our information. What makes that counterfactual true? The moral realist has an answer to this question: the mind-independent truthmakers for moral judgments (however understood by the different views) continue to exist, irrespective of what's going on with respect to our state of knowledge about the world. Wright, by contrast, has no obvious answer available to him. But until the superassertibility view answers this question, we're left in the dark as to what metaphysical stance it really takes on. It purports to be a form of antirealism, but it can't make good on that assertion until it offers a response to the truthmaker theorist's query. Put another way, the superassertibility view offers us an account of the *truth conditions* for moral judgments; but until it offers us an account of their *truthmakers*, it's left unsettled whether or not the view ultimately avoids the metaethical realism it seeks to dodge.

Finding retreat in counterfactuals, as we have seen, is a philosophical maneuver that boasts a long tradition; it's none the better for that. Truthmaker theorists are wary of those who take refuge in counterfactuals. In the face of a metaphysical question (what makes some perfectly ordinary claim true?), this strategy directs our attention not to the view's ontological commitments, but to a further truth: the counterfactual in question. Truthmaker theory reminds us not to settle for such buck-passing responses. After all, we can ask about the newly cited truth's truthmaker just as easily. An ontological question deserves an ontological answer.

The preceding also highlights how truthmaker theory has a role to play in navigating the murky waters of realism and antirealism. (I defend this claim in full in Chapter 8.) What exactly is at stake between ethical realists and ethical antirealists? As just seen, it's not always clear why certain views deserve to be thought of as being realist or antirealist. They may claim not to be committed to a realism-relevant ontology, for example, but to make good on any such assertion they have to provide their own adequate truthmaking story that demonstrates as much. Furthermore, it has often been thought that realism issues turn on the theory of truth at issue, or various other semantic notions (e.g., Fine 1984b). This thought

encounters considerable trouble in the face of various minimalist approaches to truth and semantics, at which point a collapse of the whole debate sometimes seems inevitable (see Dreier 2004). My alternative proposal is that the various debates about realism are best thought of as disputes about the nature of truthmakers and truthmaking, not about truth itself (Asay 2012). In particular, approaching the debates from the framework of truthmaker theory allows for solving various standing puzzles and problems concerning realism, from metaethics (Asay 2013e) to scientific realism (Asay 2013c) and others. Being a distinctly metaphysical form of inquiry, truthmaker theory is able to restore realism's metaphysical core: it enables us to put the "real" back into "realism." Truthmaker theory asks the sorts of questions that realists and antirealists are obliged to answer; getting clear on the reality and objectivity (or lack thereof) of a domain of thought requires getting clear on the ontological grounds supporting the truths of that domain. Truthmaker theory shows the way.

A final preliminary benefit of truthmaker theory is that it helps clear up much of the hazy thinking that clouds discussions of the nature of truth. Though I discuss this idea in greater detail later (see Chapter 6), it's worth previewing the perspective on truth itself that truthmaking offers. A truthmaker is a kind of ontological "ground" for a truth.[11] Because that truthmaker exists, the claim in question is true. This is not to say that *what it is* to be true is to have a truthmaker. Indeed, as we shall see, some truths are best thought of as not having truthmakers. Hence, to maintain that a truth needs an ontological ground is not yet to give an analysis of truth. Taking truthmaking seriously is perfectly compatible with taking truth itself to be primitive and unanalyzable, as I do (Asay 2013b), or taking truth to be a fully deflationary notion (e.g., Horwich 1990). To say, alongside deflationists, that there is nothing more to the truth of <Monotremes exist> than the existence of monotremes is decidedly *not* to say that <Monotremes exist> has no truthmaker. To the contrary, every monotreme in existence is such a truthmaker. Inquiring into truthmakers is inquiring into the metaphysics underlying *truths*; it is not an investigation into the nature of *truth* itself. As a result, we can separate two different philosophical tasks: exploring the ontological grounds of *truths*, and exploring the nature of *truth*.

[11] I say this without committing to anything debated within the "grounding" literature, which I discuss in Section 5.4. Talk of grounds in truthmaker theory predates the recent discussion of grounding in metaphysics.

0.3 Conclusion

Truthmaker theory, I hope to have shown, has implications for lots of different topics in philosophy.[12] Whenever metaphysical questions arise in philosophy, truthmakers will be relevant. Truthmaker theory, as a result, has important contributions to make to the philosophy of language, science, morality, and others. It can help us think more clearly about realism debates, and about how truth and ontology are (and are not) related. Plus, it can be used to formulate important objections to theories that fail to make their ontological commitments fully transparent.[13]

These virtues are sufficient, I believe, to warrant close inspection into truthmaking. What truthmaker theory ultimately has to offer metaphysics, and whether it can meet the objections leveled against it, are matters I take up in due course. In the first main portion of the book, I examine some of the foundational questions that face any theory of truthmaking. Chapter 1 articulates the proper methodology for truthmaker theory, and presents what is and is not required to take on board when engaging in truthmaker inquiry. Subsequent chapters explore other core issues in truthmaker theory, such as the nature of the truthmaking relation and the question of which truths have truthmakers. I also address some of the most pressing objections to truthmaker theory.

In the second part of the book, I show how the notion of truthmaking relates to a number of other perennial topics in philosophy, namely, truth, analyticity, and realism. I argue that my perspective on truthmaking motivates certain perspectives on truth, though it does not itself constitute a theory of truth. As for analyticity, I believe that truthmaking can be employed to give an informative account of what the analytic/synthetic distinction comes to that stays close to familiar thinking about analyticity. Finally, I offer an account of what is at stake in various realism debates

[12] Truthmakers have also been put to use in theology, though I won't be engaging such arguments. See, e.g., Bergmann and Brower 2006 and Timpe 2007. Other applications of truthmaker theory include using it to offer accounts of indeterminacy (Greenough 2008), fundamentality (Barnes 2012, Fisher 2016, Cameron 2018), and propositions (Jago 2017), discuss free will (Hermes 2014, Robinson 2016), explore the philosophy of history (Boulter 2017), solve the semantic paradoxes (Barker 2014), consider its ability to define physicalism (Morris 2018), and probe the question as to why there is something rather than nothing (e.g., Armstrong 1989b, 2003: 18–19, 2004: 89–91, and 2007: 103, Lewis 2001b: 611, Efird and Stoneham 2009, and Lovett 2014). I will not be discussing the "truthmaker semantics" of Kit Fine (e.g., 2014), as it seems to me to have co-opted the term for different purposes.

[13] Cf. Robinson: "I believe that it can be heuristically useful at times to view metaphysical questions through truthmaker 'spectacles'" (2000: 159). Robinson puts on these glasses when critiquing views that posit "primitive thisness."

(such as in metaethics and the philosophy of science) in terms of truthmaking.

In the final part of the book, I turn to metaphysics directly, and apply my truthmaking framework to a variety of metaphysical disputes. Specifically, I investigate the topics of nominalism, presentism, mathematical entities, and fictional entities. While truthmaker theory, even when practiced from my particular perspective, does not itself offer some unique theory on these topics, it does provide a helpful framework for exploring them. All told, I hope to make a convincing case that truthmakers are a productive resource in metaphysics, and that their importance should be recognized.

PART I

Foundations

CHAPTER 1

A Methodology for Truthmaking

In the Introduction, I explained why we should take truthmaking seriously. One important moral to be drawn from that discussion is that the idea of truthmaking is alive and well in philosophy, even if sometimes left implicit. It is not just self-identified truthmaker theorists, then, who deploy the notion of truthmaking. However, it is truthmaker theorists who believe that framing metaphysical questions in terms of truthmaking is a useful way of defending and objecting to metaphysical positions. In fact, this is how I conceive of what it is to be a truthmaker theorist. To be a truthmaker theorist is not to accept any particular metaphysical doctrine; as we shall see, nearly every thesis under discussion within truthmaker theory is contentious. Rather, it is to adopt a methodology, to confront metaphysical questions with the tools and resources of truthmaker theory.[1] As a result, taking truthmaking seriously does not require taking on the most controversial commitments that have long been associated with it, such as the doctrine that all truths require truthmakers, or that entities such as facts or states of affairs exist. Those are positions that one may ultimately stake out, but they are not compulsory.

But what form should such truthmaking arguments take? What kind of theory should truthmaker theorists endeavor to produce? What assumptions are truthmaker theorists allowed to hold when exploring their inquiries? These sorts of questions raise methodological issues for truthmaker theorists, and are of the first importance when developing comprehensive theories of truthmaking. Those who make casual appeals to the notion of truthmaking will also benefit from some reflection on truthmaker methodology, as it is easy to fall into tempting assumptions about truthmaking that are ultimately optional.

[1] 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).

In this chapter I present a general framework for developing a theory of truthmakers, and highlight the various choice points that theorists must confront. In later chapters, I develop arguments for what I think are the best responses to those choices.

1.1 What Is a Theory of Truthmaking?

I propose that a fully developed theory of truthmaking include the following core elements:

(1) an account of what the truthmaking relation is;
(2) an account of what sorts of things stand in the relation; and
(3) an account of which truths stand in the relation.

To speak of truthmakers is to speak of objects that help us account for what is true. Element (1) investigates the nature of the relationship between a truth and its truthmakers. Element (2) explores the kinds of things that stand in the truthmaking relation: truths and truthmakers. Answering (2) involves some discussion of the nature of truths: Are there multiple kinds of truth-bearers, and if so which (if any) is primary? As for the other member of the relation, we want to know what sorts of objects count as truthmakers: Can anything be a truthmaker, or just objects of a particular kind? Finally, (3) queries whether or not all truths have truthmakers, or just some proper subset.

Those who possess a theory with (1), (2), and (3) are well on their way to being able to use it to explore various metaphysical issues. In fact, an even more developed theory of truthmaking would include:

(4) an account of which things actually stand in the truthmaking relation.

As we shall see, to produce (4) is no less than to offer a complete theory of reality, and a complete ontological inventory of the world. Accordingly, providing (4) is no simple addition to a theory of truthmaking. Still, to the extent that truthmaker theory aims to answer specific ontological questions, it needs to provide at least some particular claims as to which objects and which claims in fact stand in the relation.

Contributions to (4) will be interspersed throughout the remaining chapters. Before I can tackle them, however, I need to address the more foundational questions for truthmaker theory. I look at (1) and (3) in the next three chapters. A great deal of the truthmaking literature is devoted to

issues surrounding them, so they merit their own discussion. Element (2) is more straightforward, and I turn to it now.

1.2 Truth-Bearers

If *x* is a truthmaker for *y*, then *y* is something that is true. What sort of entity is *y*? The options run the gamut from the concrete (sentence tokens) to the mental (beliefs) to the "abstract" (propositions, sentence types).[2] They might be events (statements). In addition to the question of which truth-bearers exist, there is the question as to which of them, if any, is primary or fundamental. A common view, for instance, is that propositions are the primary bearers of truth, and that other truth-bearers are true only derivatively, by expressing true propositions (e.g., Armstrong 2004: 12).

Many philosophers maintain that these questions about truth-bearers make no particular impact on truthmaker theory: Truthmaker theorists are free to adopt whichever view about truth-bearers is most defensible, and nothing about truthmaking turns on that choice.[3] I mostly agree. I do note that there are two points that truthmaker theorists should be particularly careful about when it comes to truth-bearers. Both relate to modality.

The first point concerns whether the truth-bearer in question essentially means what it does. For any truth-bearer that carries its meaning essentially (or *is* a meaning, as some maintain about propositions), the account of what makes it true will be somewhat simpler than the account for a corresponding truth-bearer which has its meaning contingently. For example, suppose that Socrates is the truthmaker for the proposition that Socrates exists. Socrates himself, however, is not fully responsible for the truth of the English sentence "Socrates exists," on the assumption that the sentence could have meant something else. If "Socrates exists" had meant that Socrates is a fish, then Socrates would not have made it true – it wouldn't be true. Something more is required: whatever else it is that makes it true that "Socrates exists" means that Socrates exists (cf. Lewis 2001b: 604). The vast majority of truthmaking claims in the literature presuppose that the truths in question carry their meaning essentially, as very little attention is given over to "semantic" truthmaking facts about what makes it true that sentences mean what they do. The presupposition

[2] With apologies to Armstrong (e.g., 1980: 448–449, n. 3), I follow contemporary convention in using "abstract" to mean something along the lines of "non-spatiotemporal."

[3] E.g., Fox 1987: 189, Bigelow 1988: 126, Read 2000: 67, n. 1, Merricks 2007: 11, and Skiles 2014: 3650, n 2. But for the opposing view, see Heil 2000 and 2012: 158–159, Alward 2004, David 2005, Fumerton 2006, Ingthorsson 2006, Picazo 2014, and Stenwall 2016.

is harmless, so long as we're aware of it, and there really are truth-bearers with essential meanings to satisfy it.[4]

The second issue about truth-bearers concerns whether or not they are necessary existents. Truthmaking claims have modal implications. On a standard view – which I defend in Chapter 3 – if *x* is a truthmaker for *y*, then it's metaphysically necessary that if *x* exists, then *y* is true. The existence of *x*, then, is sufficient not only for the truth of *y* but for the existence of *y* as well: *y* can't be true unless it exists. Problems could arise if *y* is taken to be a contingently existing truth-bearer such as a sentence token or belief. Suppose some rock on Mount Everest (call it "Rocco") is a truthmaker for my belief that there are rocks. Rocco doesn't necessitate the *existence* of my belief, though it does guarantee that my belief is true. What this suggests is that because truthmakers do not typically necessitate the existence of contingent truth-bearers, there must be a set of necessarily existing truth-bearers (i.e., propositions) that they make true.

This sort of argument is encouraged, it seems to me, by the misleading talk of possible worlds. Imagine a possible world where life never evolved on Earth, and yet Rocco resides on Everest, never to be thought or spoken of. In this world, it's true that rocks exist, but there are no beliefs or sentence tokens or statements that express that thought. But something *in* the world must be true, and the only plausible candidate is the proposition that rocks exist, understood as a necessarily existing abstract object. Armstrong is concerned by this argument, and in response admits that propositions are the primary target of truthmaker theory, while hoping for the availability of a naturalistic account of propositions (2003: 12, 2004: 12). Trenton Merricks also uses it to argue why certain approaches to truthmaking are committed to propositions (2007: 6–7).

I think there are several fully adequate responses to this argument. Merricks suggests that truthmaking can be understood conditionally: if *x* makes *y* true, then what's necessary is that *if x* and *y* both exist, then *y* is true (2007: 7). A less extreme response is to distinguish being true *in* a world (which requires the existence of the truth-bearer in the possible world in question) and being true *of* a world (which doesn't).[5] To say that *x* makes *y* true is to say that *y* is true *of* any world in which *x* exists, regardless of whether or not *y* (which at least exists in the actual world)

[4] This issue will arise again when I turn to truthmaking and analyticity in Section 7.1.

[5] Cf. Fine 1985 and Kaplan 1989; see Carmichael 2010: 376, and Rasmussen 2014: 98–101 for criticism.

exists in the worlds in question.[6] I prefer to drop the talk of possible worlds altogether (a practice I recommend to any nonrealist about possible worlds, for reasons suggested in the Introduction) such that the in/of distinction here disappears. Talk of what is true in or of "other worlds" is just talk about what might have been. Additionally, we can make sense of the truthmaking idea without mentioning truth-bearers at all. To do so, we simply avoid semantically ascending. In other words, instead of claiming that it's necessary that if Rocco exists, then <There are rocks> is true, we can point out that what's necessary is that if Rocco exists, then it's true that there are rocks. Truthmaking claims need not essentially involve reference to truth-bearers and truth predications (cf. Fox 1987: 189).[7] Just how truthmaking relates to broader issues about truth (including the nature of semantic ascent, i.e., moving from "*p*" to "<*p*> is true") is a difficult topic, and one I focus on in Chapter 6. For now, the important lesson is simply that truthmaking alone doesn't obviously force certain views about truth-bearers. Perhaps there are successful arguments demonstrating that we should accept the existence of at least some necessarily existing propositions (e.g., Carmichael 2010 and Rasmussen 2014: chapter 4), but they are not specifically the product of a commitment to truthmaking.

Ultimately, I advocate being maximally neutral and pluralist about truth-bearers. I am not interested in denying that beliefs or sentences can be true, nor am I taking sides against views that deny the existence of beliefs, propositions, or what have you. Like many philosophers, I have my own concerns about admitting *abstracta* like propositions into my ontology. As Russell curiously claimed, "obviously propositions are nothing" (1919b: 56; cf. Armstrong 1973: 46). Still, this debate need not be settled here, and I am inclined to let the chips fall as they may. The fact remains that truthmaker theorists are not obviously committed up front to views about which truth-bearers there are. Furthermore, the notion of

[6] See also Rodriguez-Pereyra 2011: 544–546.

[7] Quantified claims about truthmakers might appear to give the lie to this claim. Consider "Some truths have truthmakers," which makes no reference to any specific truth. It entails that for some truth-bearer *y*, *y* is true and there is some *x* such that, necessarily, if *x* exists then *y* is true. In order to dispense with all the truth talk here, we may take a page from the truth deflationist's handbook (e.g., Horwich 1990). Either snow is white, and there is something such that, necessarily, if it exists then snow is white, or Socrates exists, and there is something such that, necessarily, if it exists then Socrates exists, or . . . The basic point is that talk of truth and truth-bearers can usually be dispensed with by resorting to infinite conjunctions or disjunctions. Whether these infinitary analyses are acceptable is of course up for debate (see David 1994: 93–104), but if they fail it's not because of anything to do with truthmaking specifically. Thanks to one of the external reviewers for noting this issue.

whether some truth-bearers are primary or fundamental will have no role to play in the coming arguments, so on this too I shall remain silent.

1.3 To Be Is to Be a Truthmaker

I advocate pluralism about truth-bearers. More importantly, I advocate pluralism about truthmakers. By that I mean that the concept of a truthmaker is not limited to a certain category of object. For example, one might maintain that truthmakers are, in principle, limited to objects such as facts or states of affairs (Heathcote 2003: 361, Jacquette 2010: 153, Barker 2012: 278). To the contrary, I maintain that truthmakers can be found in any ontological category. All truthmakers (it should go without saying) are existing objects. Furthermore, every last existing object is a truthmaker. Consider some arbitrary existing object, *a*. Because *a* exists, <*a* exists> is true. Hence, *a* is a truthmaker for <*a* exists>. But *a* was chosen at random, so it follows that every existing object is a truthmaker for at least one truth, namely the truth that it exists. There's nothing more to being a truthmaker than making true at least some truth, so every existing object is a truthmaker. To be is to be a truthmaker.[8]

Though I believe this argument to be sound, it has its detractors. Those opponents argue that there are some objects that do not make true the claims that those very objects exist. The familiar way of motivating this approach is to require that truthmakers be fundamental entities (Cameron 2008c, Schaffer 2010, Rettler 2016).[9] The University of Cambridge is, presumably, not a fundamental entity. Therefore, it cannot be a truthmaker for anything, including <The University of Cambridge exists>. Truthmakers are fundamental entities only – or the fundamental *entity*, in the case of Schaffer's monism (which holds that the entire cosmos is the single fundamental entity, upon which its parts depend).

There are methodological reasons not to prefer the fundamentality approach.[10] First, one might be skeptical of the project of pursuing fundamental metaphysics; it's not clear to me, anyway, how one goes

[8] Cf. Cox 1997: 46, Simons 2005: 254, and Cameron 2008b: 262. Jago refers to this view as the "ubiquity" principle (2013: 470). Another route to the conclusion is that every object is a truthmaker for <Something exists>. Thanks to one of the external reviewers for this suggestion.

[9] Heil (2012, in press) provides a tricky case. On the one hand, he argues against the thesis that the world exhibits a hierarchical structure, composed of various levels standing in various relationships of fundamentality. On the other, he regards truthmakers to be the elements of fundamental physics.

[10] See Tallant (2018: chapter 5) and Heil (in press) for skepticism about fundamentality coming from a truthmaking context.

about defending the fundamentality of certain entities, and I shall not take sides on the issue here. Second, it's not clear to me that "derivative" ontology is devoid of metaphysical interest. Ontologists should be quite concerned with what exists, even if some of those things are derivative. Plenty of existing ontological debates presuppose such interest: the existence of mereological sums, the existence of tables and chairs, the existence of minds, beliefs, and mental states, and the existence of dinosaurs have all raised substantial interest among metaphysicians, even though most parties at the table would happily concede that none of these contentious objects is fundamental. Practitioners of the special sciences should not lose interest in or abandon their work upon hearing that the physicists are in charge of fundamental science. Nor should the ontologists of "special philosophy" abandon their projects.[11]

I conclude that to be is to be a truthmaker. As a result, one doesn't "complete" the task of truthmaker theory – i.e., specifying what all the truthmakers are – until one has a completed ontological inventory. Since the truthmakers aren't a proper subset of what exists, they cannot be thought of as some special ontological category. This conclusion is appropriate, given what sort of theory truthmaker theory is. Truthmaker theory is a way of framing ontological questions. Truthmaker theorists, like other metaphysicians, are concerned to discover what exists. Truthmaker theorists have a particular way of engaging that topic, by considering the truthmaking features that all objects possess. "Discovering what the truthmakers are" isn't one ontological task alongside many others. Instead, discovering what the truthmakers are is just one way of thinking about the broader ontological task, shared by other metaphysicians, of determining what there is.

Consequently, the class of truthmakers is just as diverse as is reality. One might offer a homogenous ontology. For instance, Armstrong develops an ontology of states of affairs (1997). The world just is a giant totality state of affairs, composed by many first-order states of affairs. Armstrong doesn't deny that other sorts of objects – like dogs, cats, people, and emus – exist as well (and that they can be truthmakers); it's just that they are abstractions from states of affairs. But one could also argue for a more heterogeneous metaphysics. One immediate advantage of this fact is that truthmaker theory is not limited solely to those who, like Armstrong, ultimately endorse a particular controversial ontological view. Nominalist

[11] See, for instance, Barnes (2014), arguing that the focus on fundamentality excludes investigation into the nature of gender from qualifying as substantive metaphysical inquiry.

approaches to truthmaker theory are also in principle available (see, e.g., Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Lewis 2003, Asay 2013d, and Kriegel 2015). Truthmaker theory as a metaphysical program cannot be rejected because of its specific antecedent ontological commitments, for it has none.

1.4 How to Argue with Truthmakers

1.4.1 Catching Cheaters and Ontological Honesty

The greatest danger in advancing a truthmaker argument is in too quickly begging the question, or prematurely assuming a controversial axiom about truthmaking. As to the latter, one might, for example, reject a particular metaphysical view because it postulates a truth without a truthmaker. Supporting this sort of objection is the idea that truthmaker theory requires that *all* truths have truthmakers. (This is the thesis known as *truthmaker maximalism*.) But as I contend in Chapter 4, such an argument moves too quickly. *That* someone postulates a truth without a truthmaker is no automatic offense to truthmaker theory; I do it myself. Rather, it is *how* one goes about postulating truths without truthmakers that can raise the ontological worries that drive truthmaker theory. In this first part of the book, I cover what the crucial theoretical choice points are that truthmaker theorists can reasonably disagree about. One must be careful – especially when making casual use of truthmaking ideas – not to falsely assume that some thesis is essential to truthmaker theory, when in fact it is optional, and a source of major dispute within the literature.[12]

Another concern with truthmaking arguments is that they might systematically beg the question. This worry appears most saliently in the context of taking truthmaker theory to be a form of "cheater catching." This approach – an unfortunate development, in my view – can be found in Theodore Sider's challenge to presentism (2001: 35–42). Sider rehearses the now well-entrenched objection to presentism that an ontology of present objects alone cannot provide the necessary grounds for all the myriad truths involving the past. It's true that there were dinosaurs, but there are no dinosaurs in the present to account for that fact. (This objection will be discussed in full in Chapter 10.) In the face of this

[12] For example, MacBride (2013) argues that deflationists cannot make use of truthmaker theory, but his argument presupposes that a deflationist who uses truthmaker theory has to be a maximalist. See Section 6.4.

concern, some presentists (e.g., Bigelow 1996) posit the existence of "tensed properties" that the world possesses. Because the world presently bears the property of there having been dinosaurs, we *do* have sufficient ontological resources in the present to account for the truth of <There were dinosaurs>.

Sider declares such presentist maneuvers to be cheating. He writes: "The point of the truth-maker principle . . . is to rule out dubious ontologies" (2001: 40). Dubious ontologies, according to Sider, belong to those who posit brute dispositions (e.g., Bird 2007), brute counterfactuals (e.g., Lange 2009), and brute laws of nature (e.g., Maudlin 2007). Such positions, like presentism, are not appropriate metaphysical views in Sider's opinion, for "a proper ontology should invoke only *categorical*, or occurrent, properties and relations" (2001: 41). Merricks also claims, on behalf of truthmaker theorists, that the cheater-catching ambition is the "primary motivation" of truthmaker theory (2007: 3–4). Hence, he believes that truthmaker theories must be equipped from the outset with views about which properties are "suspicious" (2007: 37–38).[13]

I find the language of cheating in reference to the work of fellow professionals as not only unsportsmanlike, but just plain false. Anyone familiar with the work of Bird, Lange, and Maudlin can recognize the merits of their metaphysical views; to call them philosophical cheats is unnecessarily insulting. (By Sider's account, C. B. Martin – one major source of inspiration behind the current resurgence in truthmaker theory – is a cheater *par excellence*, given his defense of dispositions [Martin 2000, 2008].) Cheaters are those who break the rules, and good luck to anyone seeking consensus on the rules of metaphysical inquiry.[14] But even setting aside the unfortunate rhetoric and language, there is a dialectical problem with the Sider-Merricks perspective of truthmaking as cheater-catching. Their view, in essence, is that truthmaker theory *from the outset* must come equipped with metaphysically partisan views regarding which properties are dubious, suspicious, improper, etc.[15] But if these views are just assumed from the beginning, then the arguments that truthmaker theorists deploy against those with opposing ontologies will be blatantly question-begging. Presentists who are told they are cheaters because they invoke dubious (to Sider) truthmakers should be unimpressed. What *should*

[13] The language of cheating now surfaces frequently in the truthmaking literature. See, e.g., Heathwood 2007 and Tallant 2009a. Tallant even embraces *being* a cheater.

[14] See Baron (2016) for an admirable attempt.

[15] See Tallant (2018: chapter 2) for the difficulties involved in spelling out what makes a property dubious or suspicious.

impress presentists are arguments to the effect that their metaphysical postulates are ad hoc, unmotivated, metaphysically problematic in some way, unnecessary, unparsimonious, etc.

What I take away from these considerations is, first, that the language of cheater-catching is needlessly inflammatory and dialectically problematic. It should be abandoned, and it won't be missed. Second, to sign up for truthmaker theory is not in and of itself to sign up for a partisan metaphysics. Truthmaker theorists need not be categoricists. Again, what you sign up for when you sign up for truthmaker theory is not a view about which truths have truthmakers, what the truthmaking relation involves, or what objects are admissible as truthmakers. These are all contentious issues debated within the truthmaking community. Instead, what you sign up for is a willingness to approach metaphysical questions by thinking about truthmakers, and developing ontological theories that are shaped by truthmaking considerations.

Now, Merricks would likely object that one cannot deploy any effective truthmaking arguments until one has subscribed to some kind of partisan metaphysics. Otherwise, how can one object to suspicious accounts of truthmakers?[16] There are a number of replies. First, in a sense I agree with Merricks, in that one can make more and more sophisticated truthmaking arguments only after one has adopted various partisan positions. What I emphasize, however, is that these commitments must come *later*; they are not part and parcel of being a truthmaker theorist. Being a truthmaker theorist cannot be identified with holding fast to a certain set of doctrinal commitments. We should not accept that truthmaker theory *qua* truthmaker theory is committed to maximalism, categoricism, or other contentious metaphysical views. Second, one *can* object to objectionable accounts of truthmakers in a variety of ways. For example, if someone postulates the existence of a particular contentious object for no other reason than to satisfy a truthmaking demand, we should be concerned that the posit is ad hoc. Truthmaker theorists, like all theorists, hope to avoid making ad hoc additions to their theories. One doesn't need to take on partisan metaphysical views in order to argue that some ontological positions cannot be independently motivated. Traditional considerations of theory choice matter in truthmaker theory just as much as they matter anywhere else.

Finally, we should keep in mind that truthmaker theory is an aid to ontological discovery. To the extent that one's truthmaker theory is

[16] See also Tallant 2018: 11.

front-loaded with ontological assumptions, the very need for such discovery dissipates. As a result, it's unclear how the Sider-Merricks methodology can advance ontological investigation. Truthmaker theory is a kind of ontological theory-building, and my claim is that we should start from a reasonably neutral basis, and work from there. As the investigation progresses, partisan views will indeed emerge, and these can then lead to more and more powerful arguments. All I am contending for the moment is that we not saddle truthmaking with cheater-catching, and its commitment to out-of-the-gate partisanship.[17]

A more constructive attitude for truthmaker theory to take, one that abandons the cheater-catching perspective, is the call for ontological honesty. We should strive to put into equilibrium our views about what is true and about what exists. When assenting to the truth of a claim, we need to evaluate what the ontological consequences of that claim are, and commit ourselves accordingly. If the ontological cost should appear too high, then that is a truth to which we should not commit ourselves. But sometimes truth really is expensive, and comes at the cost of what might otherwise be attractive metaphysical views. However particular cases work themselves out, truthmaker theory encourages and advocates honest ontological accounting.

1.4.2 Constraints on Truthmakers

The first danger in a truthmaker argument, then, is in too quickly begging the question by assuming contentious metaphysical views rather than arguing for them. This danger is a natural consequence of the methodological prescriptions others have offered to truthmaker theory, and for that reason I suggest that no one follow that advice. A second, and related, methodological point is that one does not offer a good truthmaking argument simply by offering a truthmaker for some contested truth. It is sometimes thought that truthmaker arguments are easy – *too* easy, in fact, such that the enterprise of offering them is philosophically worthless. This attitude is expressed by Timothy Williamson when he writes: "if an entity were required, a phenomenalist or behaviourist with truthmaking inclinations could blithely postulate a fact, state of affairs, or trope with the required modal profile" (2013: 403). Here Williamson refers to the kinds of metaphysical views (discussed in the Introduction) that quickly commit

[17] Jago (2018: 56–57) also rejects the cheater-catching motivation for truthmaking.

to truths without pausing to reflect on the ontology needed to support them. The suggestion that a truthmaking inquiry can be answered by "blithely postulating" a truthmaker is tantamount to saying that ad hoc posits are acceptable to truthmaker theorists. Williamson gives no argument for this uncharitable interpretation of truthmaker theory.[18] No one giving a fair hearing to truthmaker theory would accept that its goals are so easily satisfied. According to that view, for any truth P, one could postulate some entity P* and stipulate that P* makes P true. Truthmaker theorists are no more committed to this ham-fisted approach to metaphysics than is any other inquirer.[19]

What, then, does make for a good answer to a truthmaking query? There is no simple answer; none should be expected in metaphysics. As I said, good luck to anyone trying to nail down the rules of metaphysics, or any other area of philosophy. I will not go so far as to say, from the outset, that requirements like Sider's categoricity are required for adequate truthmakers. That move too easily begs the question against competing, well-developed metaphysical views. What I can confidently say is that the entities posited by truthmaker theorists should not be ad hoc; that is, their existence ought to be independently motivated, apart from their role as satisfying certain truthmaking inquiries. Entities like tropes and states of affairs, for example, have long been appealed to by truthmaker theorists, but their existence has been argued for independently of any immediate connections to truthmaker theory. Those entities come to us from the tradition of realism and nominalism, one of the most ancient of metaphysical puzzles, and we find them again and again in metaphysics, such as in discussions over laws of nature (see, e.g., Dretske 1977, Tooley 1977, and Armstrong 1983). That these entities have found a role to play in truthmaker theory is no giant surprise, given that the ontological concerns of realists and nominalists and other metaphysicians can be understood in a truthmaking framework.

Truthmaker theorists, then, are not happy with just any metaphysical posit to satisfy a truthmaking inquiry. They seek after entities whose existence we have reason to believe in, apart from just truthmaking

[18] See also Daly 2000 and 2005: 102, and Dodd 2002a: 81.

[19] Cf. Armstrong: "The discovery of what are in fact truthmakers for a particular truth can be as difficult and controversial as the whole enterprise of ontology" (2000: 150). This is not to say that no one has ever blithely postulated a truthmaker in a truthmaking context; see, e.g., Craig (2001) on "counterfactual facts." But such practice is not the norm, and is not lauded by most truthmaker theorists.

considerations. When entities are posited solely to satisfy a demand for a truthmaker, we should maintain a healthy dose of skepticism toward them. After all, as we shall see, an open avenue is to consider the possibility that some truths lack truthmakers. As a result, in some cases the best response is to forgo the existence of a truthmaker, rather than posit one solely to play that role. When that move is appropriate must be decided on a case by case basis. In Chapter 4, for example, I investigate the particularly prominent case of negative existentials, where these issues take center stage.

1.4.3 Conclusion

Arguments in truthmaker theory take a variety of forms. Sometimes they are arguments for the existence of certain entities (tropes, facts, states of affairs, etc.), premised upon the need for such entities to satisfy genuine truthmaking requirements. At other times, truthmaking arguments target metaphysical views by claiming that they lack sufficient ontological resources to make good on their theoretical commitments. I shall be offering both sorts of arguments in the coming pages. In developing such arguments, my main methodological recommendations are the following. First, avoid presupposing contentious metaphysical views that beg the question against alternative ontologies. Sider's admonitions for allowing only essentially categorical truthmakers will have little argumentative effect on dispositionalist views.

Second, avoid presupposing contentious views about truthmaking itself, such as truthmaker maximalism. Without that presupposition, it's always an open question whether a truth does or doesn't have a truthmaker. That said, it doesn't follow that both perspectives are equally plausible for all truths. Some truths are more plausibly thought of as *truthmaker gaps* (i.e., truths without truthmakers) than are others. Truthmaker nonmaximalism is no slippery slope to truthmaker nihilism (*contra* Williamson 2013: 403).

Third, the truthmakers posited ought to be entities that can be independently motivated, so as to avoid their being ad hoc. Truthmaking considerations are just one among many reasons for believing in the existence of any entity. Ideally, a proposed truthmaker should be something we have independent need for in our ontology. Should we find ourselves faced with posits being used solely to satisfy truthmaking demands, we should proceed with extreme caution.

Though these recommendations seem rather minimal, opponents of truthmaker theory have sought to undermine the enterprise by suggesting

that anything goes when it comes to arguing about truthmakers. The reality is that truthmaker theory is a disciplined area of metaphysics, and abides by the same argumentative strictures and standards operant in other areas of rational inquiry. Even if truthmaker theorists haven't always lived up to these recommendations (some, for example, too quickly presuppose the truth of maximalism), they certainly can and should.

CHAPTER 2

Truthmaking, Accounting, and Explanation

As I asserted in Chapter 1, a fully developed theory of truthmaking should offer accounts of what the truthmaking relation is and which truths have truthmakers. These questions are not completely independent of one another. Some aspects of my view regarding which truths have truthmakers directly follow from the account of the truthmaking relation that I defend. My view of the truthmaking relation is itself deeply influenced by my conception of what the truthmaking enterprise is, and so that topic is the one I address first. In this chapter, I distinguish two broad conceptions of what the truthmaker project is all about. On the one hand, it might be thought of as a project of *alethic explanation*, that is, of offering systematic explanations as to why true truth-bearers are true (and why false truth-bearers are false). On the other hand, it might be a project of *ontological accounting*, of properly coordinating our beliefs and ontological inventories. I've already signaled my preference for the latter approach, and in this chapter I defend it against the explanatory paradigm. This conception of truthmaking as ontological accounting informs my conception of how we should think about the relation of truthmaking. I begin the chapter by articulating the two perspectives on truthmaking, and defend the accounting approach over the explanatory conception. The accounting focus will then enable me to explain how I understand the relationship between truthmaking and ontological commitment, which is where the chapter ends.

2.1 Two Approaches to Truthmaking

My central contention in this section is that two competing ideas have found traction in the truthmaking literature, and both – when fully spelled out – motivate contrasting perspectives about the enterprise of truthmaking. The first perspective, which I defend, considers truthmaking to be a form of *ontological accounting*, and understands truthmaker theory to be in

the business of answering the fundamental ontological question "What is there?"[1] The second perspective takes truthmaking to be a project engaged in what I call *alethic explanation*. Truthmaking so understood focuses on truthmaking being an explanatory enterprise, and concentrated around the goal of answering the question "Why are truths true?" The trend in the truthmaking literature, or so it seems to me, has been to shy away from the accounting perspective (which dominated the early motivation for truthmaker theory), and take more seriously the explanatory project. I think this is an unfortunate development.[2] The explanatory approach saddles truthmaker theorists with severe theoretical burdens, and renders them susceptible to a number of formidable objections.[3]

According to the accounting perspective, truthmaker theory is a way of probing ontological questions. As I argued in Section 1.3, to be is to be a truthmaker. To discover what all the truthmakers are is to discover all of what there is. One way of querying whether a certain kind of entity exists is to explore whether it's needed as a truthmaker for certain truths. Are numbers, understood as Platonic entities, needed to be truthmakers for the truths of mathematics (Baron 2013d)? Do ethical truths require *sui generis* nonnatural properties (Moore 1903), or can they be made true by perfectly natural properties (Railton 1986)? What sorts of truthmakers are scientific realists committed to (Asay 2013c)? Do truths about the past require an eternalist ontology (Caplan and Sanson 2011)? In all these matters, the focus is on ontology: what is the most defensible answer to the question of what exists, and how can thinking about truthmakers illuminate the investigation?

The accounting perspective is apparent in the early truthmaking arguments given against phenomenalists, behaviorists, and others. (See again the Introduction.) The charge made against such views was that they failed to do proper cognitive accounting. The views embraced the truth of various counterfactuals, but fell silent on what sort of ontology was needed to back them up. To claim that counterfactual truths such as <If Berkeley

[1] Rettler (2016) argues that it's an open question what the fundamental ontological question is, and he opts for taking it to be "What are the truthmakers?" Given that to be is to be a truthmaker, *I* take Rettler's question to be extensionally identical to mine, though he doesn't, since truthmakers on his view must be fundamental entities.

[2] One consequence is that it has led some to completely miss the possibility of truthmaking as ontological accounting. Perrine (2015), for instance, demands that a truthmaker theorist must fall into what I am identifying as the explanation-first paradigm. See Tallant (2018: 141) for a long list of those subscribing to the alethic explanation camp.

[3] I first raised this contention in Asay (2016b), where I discuss the matter in connection with various theoretical principles governing truthmaker theory. I discuss it further in Asay (2018c).

had visited the quad, he would have had a tree-like sense impression> can be true without any benefit of a truthmaker, or to ignore the issue altogether, is to disregard ontology and the legitimate questions it raises. For those who take ontological questions seriously, asking after truthmakers is one way of performing metaphysical investigation. It is not enough to offer a philosophical theory about what is true; one must also produce the ontology that grounds those truths. As a result, truthmaking thought of as ontological accounting is an "ontology-first" approach: it takes its *raison d'être* to be the investigation of what there is.

The alternative perspective, which I claim to be growing in esteem, is that truthmakers are fundamentally about alethic explanation. That is to say, the primary function of truthmaker theory is to give explanations as to why true truth-bearers are true (see, e.g., Tallant 2018: 6). The target of truthmaker theory is not what exists, but explanations for what is true. Now, I do not mean to suggest that these two goals are necessarily in conflict. One might maintain that the proper explanation of a truth in all cases requires an ontological answer in the form of a truthmaker. In fact, this perspective is likely behind the thinking of these "explanation-first" truthmaker theorists. My point in drawing the distinction is rather to demonstrate that the two issues do not have to come so closely together: one can explore the ontological requirements for truths without at the same time committing to further views about the proper explanation of truth. Furthermore, one can offer various explanations of truth that do not venture into truthmaking territory. That truthmakers have a special province in the explanation of truth is an optional view, and one which dialectically weakens truthmaker theory by front-loading it with contentious commitments and opening it to a series of objections.

Appeals to explanation within truthmaker theory are easy to find. Aaron Griffith writes: "Truthmakers are supposed to account for and explain their truths: entity x is a truthmaker for proposition p only if p is true *because* x exists" (2013: 305; cf. Bigelow 1988: 121, Molnar 2000: 82, Keller 2004: 86, Correia 2011: 1, and Perrine 2015: 188). Naoaki Kitamura concurs, noting that "the explanatory constraint on truthmaking to which Griffith appeals is plausible and innocuous to all truthmaker theorists" (2014: 202; cf. Rhoda 2009: 46–47, Schulte 2011: 414, and Asay and Baron 2014: 316–317). David Liggins (2005) explicitly presents truthmaking as a kind of explanation. Furthermore, explanation is wielded within truthmaking arguments to criticize various opposing views. Griffith (2013) argues that all of the main views about truthmakers for negative existentials fail because they are explanatorily deficient. Sanson and Caplan

(2010) argue that the truthmakers that presentists have offered for truths about the past are not "proper explanations."[4]

Perhaps the most prominent proponent of explanation-first truthmaking is Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra.[5] This stance can be gleaned from his arguments against the "conjunction principle," which states that any truthmaker for a conjunction is a truthmaker for its conjuncts (2000, 2006b, 2009). Take, for example, <Penguins exist and pandas exist>. A typical truthmaking account holds that any mereological sum between a penguin and a panda will suffice. (Or, if one is skeptical of mereological sums, one might take the penguin and panda to collectively make the conjunction true.) Suppose Opus the penguin and Jia Jia the panda form one such sum. The conjunction principle entails that because the sum Opus + Jia Jia is a truthmaker for <Penguins exist and pandas exist>, it is a truthmaker for both <Penguins exist> and <Pandas exist>.[6] Rodriguez-Pereyra takes such cases to be counterexamples to the conjunction principle, because although the mereological sum provides a truthmaker for the conjunction, it does not make the individual conjuncts true. Why not? According to Rodriguez-Pereyra,

> a conjunctive fact is what a certain proposition is true in virtue of only if all the conjuncts contribute to the truth of the proposition. When some but not all the conjuncts of a conjunctive fact contribute to the truth of a certain proposition, the proposition is true in virtue of a part of the conjunctive fact, but not in virtue of the conjunctive fact itself. (2006b: 972; cf. Fiocco 2013: 7–12)

In other words, if any entity includes any "extraneous" part that is irrelevant to the truth in question, the entity is disqualified from being its truthmaker.

What we can discern in Rodriguez-Pereyra's view is a very intimate relationship between truth and truthmaker. Truthmakers, for Rodriguez-Pereyra, go beyond entities that provide an ontological accounting for something being true. Jia Jia and Opus together provide sufficient ground for the truth of <Penguins exist>. Opus provides it by himself, of course, and adding Jia Jia into the picture doesn't do anything to disrupt that. No one can accuse those with Opus + Jia Jia in their ontology of shirking their

[4] For other truthmaking appeals to explanation, see Caputo 2007: 277, Lowe 2007: 238, and Smith and Simon 2007: 88–98.

[5] For different accounts of truthmaking that still rely heavily on explanation, see Liggins 2005 and Schulte 2011 and 2014.

[6] I am assuming here that Opus is essentially a penguin, and Jia Jia essentially a panda.

ontological duty with respect to <Penguins exist>. (After all, it's metaphysically impossible for Opus + Jia Jia to exist, but <Penguins exist> not be true.) But Rodriguez-Pereyra requires more. He wants to identify what it is in reality *in virtue of which* truths are true, where the phrase "in virtue of" takes on a theoretically loaded reading. That reading is an explanatory one: because Jia Jia plays no role in explaining the truth of <Penguins exist>, she plays no part in any truthmaker for <Penguins exist>.

Hopefully the contrast between ontology-first and explanation-first truthmaking is fairly clear. When it comes to the truthmaker for <Penguins exist>, the former is interested first and foremost in committing to an ontology that doesn't leave the truth "hanging on air," as Armstrong puts it (2004: 3). What can this truth tell us about ontology, about what exists? The latter approach takes the truth of the proposition not to be, in the first instance, a guide to ontology, but rather as something itself in need of explanation. As the explanation proceeds, ontological implications will presumably follow, but the ontology is ultimately in service to the fundamental task of explaining the truth of truth-bearers.

The twin conceptions of truthmaking as guide to ontology and as alethic explanation are both well-entrenched in the literature on truthmaking. Both ideas surface, and feature in basic statements about what truthmaking is all about. Again, they don't necessarily clash. But what Rodriguez-Pereyra's view demonstrates is how the explanation-first paradigm, drawn to its limit, comes into conflict with the more modest ambitions of ontology-first truthmaking. Not everyone agrees with Rodriguez-Pereyra's assessment of the conjunction principle.[7] For many (e.g., Armstrong 2004 and López de Sa 2009), extraneous parts do not nullify truthmaking.[8] That perspective makes most sense if the theoretical purpose of a truthmaker is to provide sufficient ontological ground for a truth. The danger of adopting truths without truthmakers is that doing so abandons ontological responsibility. But providing *more* than is required is by no means eschewing that responsibility. Yet if the project is to find explanations of truth, then Rodriguez-Pereyra's point has force. If our goal is not just to have our ontological ducks in a row, but to have a precise account of why a particular truth-bearer is true, then the extraneous parts can indeed appear to be antithetical to the project. We want to know what

[7] I would guess that rejecting the conjunction principle is the minority view. But see Kalhat 2008, Barker 2012: 276, Lowe 2013: 208, and Jago 2018: 180.

[8] Such theorists might at this juncture appeal to the notion of a *minimal* truthmaker. I don't develop this idea, as I make no use of it in the current work. For more on minimal truthmakers, see Armstrong 2004: 19–23, Fisher 2015, and O'Conaill and Tahko 2016.

it is in the world that explains why <Penguins exist> is true, and Jia Jia has nothing to do with it.

I suggest that part of the explanation for why there are clashing judgments over the case of extraneous parts is that both the ontology-first and explanation-first perspectives are alive and operant in contemporary thinking about truthmaking. When truthmaking as ontology building is emphasized, extraneous parts pose no harm. When truthmaking as a special kind of explanation is emphasized, extraneous parts now seem opposed to the enterprise. My own view is that explanation-first truthmaking should be abandoned. It offers no theoretical benefit over the ontology-first focus on truthmaking. As I argue in the next two chapters, ontology-first truthmaking affords us better accounts of how the truthmaking relation should be analyzed, and how we should evaluate truthmaker maximalism. But explanation-first truthmaking is problematic on its own, as I now argue.

2.2 A Dilemma for Explanation-First Truthmaking[9]

The problems facing explanation-first truthmaking can be assembled together as a dilemma. According to the view of truthmaking as alethic explanation, the goal of providing truthmakers is to explain why truth-bearers are true. However, there are many ways of explaining truth, plenty of which have no direct implications for truthmaking. These explanations do not come pre-equipped with the sorts of ontological commitments that accompany views about truthmaking, and thus are less costly. Furthermore, these explanations are sometimes *better* explanations of truth than are truthmaking explanations. Here, then, is the dilemma. The goal of explanation-first truthmaking is either to provide *some* explanation or other of truth, or to provide a *particular* kind of explanation of truth. If the former, then there are non-truthmaking explanations that do the job simpler or better. If the latter, then the view takes on a theoretical task that is insufficiently motivated.

Consider the first horn of the dilemma. There is nothing indispensable about truthmakers to the general task of explaining truth. There are myriad ways of explaining truth; any explanation, after all, is an explanation of truth. One view, familiar from the philosophy of science, maintains that explaining a truth is a matter of showing how it follows deductively from a set of true premises, an essential member of which is a law of nature (Hempel and Oppenheim 1948). Explanations according to this

[9] The discussion in this section closely follows Asay 2018c.

"deductive-nomological" (D-N) account are arguments. Suppose we want to explain the truth of <The liquid in the Yangtze boils at 100 degrees Celsius>. The following is a D-N explanation for it:

(1) All samples of water at standard pressure boil at 100 degrees Celsius.
(2) The liquid in the Yangtze is a sample of water at standard pressure.

Therefore,

(3) The liquid in the Yangtze boils at 100 degrees Celsius.

The argument's first premise is a law of nature[10] and is indispensable to the argument being sound. Hence, the argument qualifies as a D-N explanation. But sometimes explanations are more informal. Consider:

> The liquid in the Yangtze is water, and for the vapor pressure of water to reach the amount of air pressure outside the water at standard pressure, the temperature must reach 100 degrees Celsius. Bubbles of vaporized water are then released from the water and into the air, resulting in boiling.

Both of these responses are adequate explanations of the truth of <The liquid in the Yangtze boils at 100 degrees Celsius>. They provide insight into the matter, showing how the particular fact to be explained follows from general nomological facts. But neither is about truthmakers. To accept these explanations, one accepts that the claims constitutive of them are true. But nowhere do these explanations explicitly force ontological commitments onto those who accept them, in the way that truthmaking explanations do.

A truthmaking explanation of <The liquid in the Yangtze boils at 100 degrees Celsius>, by contrast, invokes the entities that one needs to include within one's ontology, if this proposition is believed to be true. Presumably it would involve some combination of the Yangtze itself, the air outside of it, and the relevant laws of nature (however understood). This form of explanation is ontological to the core; its entire purpose is to cite what sorts of ontological commitments are required for anyone embracing the truth. As such, it cannot compete in terms of ontological parsimony with non-truthmaking explanations. Take, for example, the most extreme case of attempting to explain truth without heavy-duty recourse to ontology. Several philosophers have argued that the best way to "explain truth" is by appeal to instances of schema (B):

(B) <*p*> is true because *p*.

[10] Though not really. See Chang 2004.

According to these philosophers, we can explain why, for example, <Pangolins are endangered> is true by pointing out that pangolins are endangered (e.g., Hornsby 2005, Schnieder 2006b, Dodd 2007, and Williamson 2013).[11] The "because" here invokes an asymmetric explanatory relationship that holds between the two claims, <<*p*> is true> and <*p*>. To accept the instances of (B) – which are anything but problematic – is to have all the explanation of truth one needs.[12] The maneuver works in all cases, including those most troubling for truthmaker theory, such as negative existentials: <There are no fire-breathing dragons> is true because there are no fire-breathing dragons. Nothing more needs to be said. Truthmaker theorists, meanwhile, search after contentious entities such as states of affairs, tropes, absences, and totalities in their explanations of truth. But if the overall philosophical goal is to be able to offer some explanation or other of truth, then the truthmaker theorist's explanations are too costly to take seriously.

Explanation-first truthmaker theorists open themselves up to such objections when they stress their job as one of explaining truth. There are always explanations of truth available that are less contentious than those offered by truthmaker theorists. Schema (B) provides one simple way of generating them. Furthermore, it's not clear that truthmaker explanations are even appropriate for many explanatory demands. This is most clear in cases that bring out the contrastive nature of explanation (see van Fraassen 1980: 127). Suppose Victor went for a hike up Victoria Peak on the day of the Chung Yeung Festival. In that case, <Victor hiked up Victoria Peak during the Chung Yeung Festival> is true. When providing a truthmaker for this truth, one might appeal to an event, should events figure into one's ontology. But by offering a truthmaker, one is not doing what one normally does when explaining the truth of <Victor hiked up Victoria Peak during the Chung Yeung Festival>. Explanatory requests typically take the form of "why" questions: Why did Victor hike up Victoria Peak during the Chung Yeung Festival? "Why" questions are answered with "because" claims, which are the hallmark of explanation. But notice how this simple "why" question is actually several:

(1) Why did *Victor* hike up Victoria Peak during the Chung Yeung Festival? (Because Victor enjoys the outdoors more than Freddie.)

[11] See Asay and Baron (2020) and Section 5.3 for further discussion and criticism of this "deflationary" perspective.

[12] Note, however, that Cameron (2008d: 123) denies some instances of the schema.

(2) Why did Victor *hike* up Victoria Peak during the Chung Yeung Festival? (Because the line for the Peak Tram was too long.)
(3) Why did Victor hike up *Victoria Peak* during the Chung Yeung Festival? (Because hiking up Tai Mo Shan would have taken all day.)
(4) Why did Victor hike up Victoria Peak during the *Chung Yeung Festival*? (Because it's traditionally thought to bring good luck to go hiking on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.)

Here are four distinct requests for explanation, and a distinct explanation for each. None of them involves the proposed truthmaker for <Victor hiked up Victoria Peak during the Chung Yeung Festival>. Hence, truthmaker explanations are sometimes no help at all when explaining truth, for at least one way that requests for explanation are normally understood.

The moral of the first horn of the dilemma is that explanations come in numerous forms, and the explanations that come in the form of truthmakers enjoy no obvious privilege over the others. Some other forms of explanation are less ontologically contentious, and some explanatory requests are left unanswered by offerings of truthmakers.[13] The truthmaker theorist's best response to this horn is to maintain that the job of truthmaker theory is not to offer *the* correct explanation of truth, but rather to offer a particular kind of explanation that only truthmaker theory can offer. This response takes us to the second horn of the dilemma: if truthmaker explanations are a distinct and unique form of explanation, then it is incumbent upon explanation-first truthmaker theorists to account for what this distinctive form of explanation is, and why it's necessary for a proper accounting of truth. Such an account, I shall argue, is unmotivated. It steers too closely to the project of defining truth itself, and is independently problematic.

If the explanatory paradigm is to avoid the first horn of the dilemma, it must establish that truthmaker theory offers a distinctive and necessary form of explanation. What is the nature of this explanatory project? Explanation-first truthmaking takes truths themselves to be in need of explanations, and believes that it is the job of truthmaker theorists to provide them. Truth needs explanation, and truthmakers offer it. Viewed

[13] Tallant (2018: chapter 7) argues similarly. He thinks a deflationary theory of truth that ignores questions about truthmaking can offer explanations of truth. Because a deflationary theory of truth that ignores truthmaking is more economical than any theory of truthmaking, theories of truthmaking are inferior explanations of truth. Tallant takes this to undermine truthmaker theory across the board; I take it to show that it was always a mistake to link the fortunes of truthmaking to some vague appeal to explanation.

in this light, explanation-first truthmaking can be seen as being fundamentally interested in *truth* (whereas ontology-first truthmaking is fundamentally interested in, appropriately enough, *ontology*). Accordingly, explanation-first truthmaker theorists are likely to see themselves tasked with the same challenge facing theorists of truth: Can we give a unified, principled account of why truths are true? Truthmaker theorists often understand themselves to be the inheritors of the correspondence theory of truth. Here, for instance, is David Armstrong: "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).[14] My proposal, then, is that explanation-first truthmaking is best viewed as an attempt to revive and/or modify the correspondence theory of truth in the form of truthmaker theory.

Rodriguez-Pereyra's uncompromising position on the conjunction principle bears out this comparison. The correspondence theory entails that truth requires the right kind of match between a worldly item (a fact, perhaps) and a truth-bearing item (be it a sentence, proposition, belief, or something else). The corresponding object, and the kind of relationship it shares with the truth-bearer, is what accounts for the truth-bearer's truth. What Rodriguez-Pereyra articulates is the idea that extraneous parts disrupt correspondence. What it is to be true is to match some portion of reality; when the matching isn't just right, truth is not to be found. <Penguins exist> doesn't match the mereological sum of Jia Jia and Opus. It matches only Opus (and other penguins). The goal of a theory of *truth* is to identify precisely the conditions under which a truth-bearer possesses the property of truth. If the goal of a theory of *truthmaking* is also to explain truth, then it is appropriate to dismiss objects with extraneous parts as not being truthmakers. Similarly, it would be inappropriate to explain the color of some object by appealing to both its color property and its mass, say.

On the interpretation and reconstruction offered here, then, explanation-first truthmaking builds its case for legitimacy on fulfilling the philosophical challenge that the correspondence theory of truth

[14] See also Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984: 288–289, Fox 1987, Bigelow 1988: 122, Smith 1989, Linsky 1994, Sundholm 1994: 117, Oliver 1996: 69, O'Leary-Hawthorne and Oppy 1997: 175–176, Lynch 1998: 119, Armstrong 2000: 150, 2004: 16–17, and 2010: 11, 62, Dodd 2000: 2, Molnar 2000: 85, Read 2000: 67, Newman 2002, Heathcote 2003, Johansson 2004: 154, Kukso 2006, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006a, Clementz 2007, Mumford 2007b: 313, Cameron 2008a: 412, 2008b: 263, and 2008d: 108, Parsons 2009: 217, and Rami 2009: 2.

(alongside other substantive theories of truth) set out to solve. However, this perspective overestimates the legitimacy of the correspondence theory. Quine opined, in a very deflationary spirit, that Tarski's "T-schema" (i.e., "'*p*' is true if and only if *p*") is "the valid residue of the correspondence theory of truth" (Quine 1990: 93). Explanation-first truthmaker theorists take their own theory as the "valid residue." The most defensible view, however, falls somewhere in the middle. What the correspondence theory gets right is that truth, in general, is grounded in reality. Truth depends on reality. Quine mistakenly sees that insight inside the formal machinery that Tarski provides,[15] and explanatory truthmaker theorists effectively build an entire theory of truth in terms of truthmaking to capture it. Ontology-first truthmaking best preserves the legacy of the correspondence theory by keeping truth and ontology rightly tied together, but not in the form of a theory of the nature of truth itself. Truths can have truthmakers without those truthmakers themselves constituting what it is for those truths to be true. That is to say, even when a truth has a truthmaker, this is not necessarily because what it is for that truth to be true is for it to have a truthmaker.

My claim is that explanation-first truthmaker theorists have built into their conception of truthmaker theory the task of explaining truth itself.[16] But explaining the nature of truth is the province of theories of truth, not theories of truthmaking. Explaining what it is to be true, and explaining what makes something true, are distinct philosophical duties. I believe that the best way of understanding views like the correspondence theory is that they attempt to solve both philosophical issues at once: to be true is to be made true, to stand in the right kind of relationship to something in reality. But this bringing together of truth and truthmaking is optional. One might defend a deflationary view of truth: All there is to truth is instances of the truth schema, such as "<Penguins exist> is true if and only if penguins exist" (e.g., Horwich 1990). There is no need to give a substantive analysis of what is involved in the predication of truth here (if it even is a predication – see Grover 1992 for a defense of prosententialism). But to say that truth is not in need of substantive analysis is not to say that *nothing* makes <Penguins exist> true. Deflationists are not forced to deny an ontological commitment to penguins.

[15] See Chapter 6.

[16] Or, more modestly, they pursue their truthmaker theory in a way that lends itself to also giving a theory of truth. Jago (2018), for instance, proceeds in this fashion. I argue against all attempts to use truthmaking to define truth in Section 6.2.

Their view *should* be simply that the objects that provide truths with ontological grounds do not figure into the analysis of the notion of truth itself.[17] Furthermore, consider those who believe that some truths do not have any truthmakers whatsoever. On such views, <There are no flying penguins> is true, but not because of having any truthmaker. But if to be true just is to be made true, then any claim without a truthmaker couldn't be true. The very possibility of nonmaximalism about truthmaking shows that the projects of explaining truth and truthmaking can in principle be separated.

As the need for offering a substantive theory of truth dwindles, so too does the need for explanation-first truthmaking. After all, the core of the correspondence theory is still maintained by ontology-first truthmaking, which takes its goal to be determining what sort of ontology is needed to properly ground all that is true. It does this without antecedent commitment to truth being a substantive notion in need of philosophical analysis, or to truthmaker maximalism. Elsewhere, I have defended a perspective on truth that takes it to be a *metaphysically deflationary* property (Asay 2014). That is to say, there is no sparse metaphysical property or relation that is responsible for accounting for all instances of a truth-bearer being true. Traditional truth deflationists are correct in their idea that each truth is its own individual affair. <Snow is white> is true because of the color of snow, and <Penguins live in Antarctica> is true because of penguin geography. They are not true in virtue of some shared property. This is not the place to defend my anti-correspondence perspective on the theory of truth. I return to that topic in Chapter 6, as I firmly believe that clear thinking about truthmaking leads to clearer thinking about truth. Indeed, I believe, *pace* Armstrong (2004: 16), that recognition of the need for truthmakers motivates a *rejection*, not a vindication, of the correspondence theory of truth, and leads to (a particularly limited version of) deflationism.[18] What explanation-first truthmakers theorists need to do, given their need to explain truth in terms of truthmaking, is motivate this further theoretical project. It incurs the costs of maximalism (an idea I'll

[17] In reality, many deflationists (e.g., Horwich 2008) are skeptical of truthmaker theory. I think this is a mistake. I believe that deflationists' skepticism about truthmaking is appropriate only for explanation-first truthmaking, given its implicit task of building a substantive, non-deflationary account of truth itself. See Section 6.4.

[18] Armstrong at times suggests that truthmaker theory is a kind of compromise between correspondence and redundancy views of truth (1993: 435; cf. 1997: 128), and I'm inclined to agree.

pick up on below), and encounters the challenges facing substantive theories of truth.

Some final challenges for explanation-first truthmaking bear mentioning. What becomes evident in Rodriguez-Pereyra's view is the necessity of "Goldilocks" truthmakers – entities that are not too big, not too small, but just right.[19] Jia Jia, we have been supposing, is a truthmaker for <Pandas exist>. Most truthmaker theorists accept this without second thought.[20] But is <Pandas exist> really true in virtue of *Jia Jia*? Had she never existed, it would probably still be true that pandas exist. The truth of <Pandas exist> doesn't appear to depend on Jia Jia in particular; it depends on there being some panda or other, but "there being some panda or other" is not the name of any entity I know of. Rodriguez-Pereyra's view encourages us to look for a very close match between truth and truthmaker; but in so doing it becomes less clear how to make sense of cases where there is a metaphysical gap (here signaled by a lack of obvious dependence) between truth and purported truthmaker.

The demand for Goldilocks truthmakers also opens the door to troubling questions as to when an entity really is "just right." Jia Jia plus the piece of bamboo she's currently chewing is too big to make <Pandas exist> true, Rodriguez-Pereyra would say. Presumably, though, Jia Jia could lose a few parts (some fur, a tooth, the bamboo already digesting in her stomach) without ceasing to be a truthmaker. If she can lose those things without effect on the truth of <Pandas exist>, doesn't that show that they, too, are extraneous? Once a demand is made for truthmakers that are perfectly matched to their truths, a full accounting of the requisite matching is called for. Here we resurrect the traditional objection to the correspondence theory of the puzzlement over what "correspondence" amounts to. A benefit of contemporary truthmaker theory over traditional correspondence theory is supposed to be the superior clarity of the former's foundational relation (cf. Armstrong 2004: 16). Truthmaker theory taking the route of the explanatory paradigm loses that advantage.

These issues about precise matching are moot from the perspective of ontology-first truthmaking. Those who commit to Jia Jia in their ontology have done their ontological due diligence with respect to <Pandas exist>. The same goes for anyone who has the mereological sum of Jia Jia and

[19] Cf. the notions of exact and inexact verification in Fine 2014.

[20] See, e.g., Simons 1992: 162, Rodriguez-Pereyra 1999: 177, Smith 1999: 282–283, Liggins 2005: 110, and Pagès 2009: 49. But see Smith and Simon 2007: 93 for dissent.

Opus. The question about whether these entities are the perfectly tailored truthmakers for explaining the truth of <Pandas exist> doesn't arise, since explaining the truth of the proposition is not the concern of ontology-first truthmaker theorists. Their concern is with maintaining an adequate ontology that is appropriate for the stock of truths they accept. The debate between Rodriguez-Pereyra and López de Sa over whether or not Jia Jia + Opus is a truthmaker for <Penguins exist> is, therefore, idle. There is no genuine *ontological* disagreement here: both theorists will end up with Jia Jia and Opus in their ontologies. Their disagreement concerns only whether or not a certain explanatory relation obtains between the penguin, the panda, and the various propositions. For ontology-first truthmaking, where the objective is to settle on the right ontology, there is no dispute left to prosecute. It doesn't matter which entity "really" explains the truth of the truth-bearer. All the matters is that our ontology is properly populated.

The explanation-based model of truthmaker theory clings too strongly to the past. It carries forward too much of the program of the correspondence theory: explaining the nature of truth by way of its connection to reality. Yes, truth is grounded in ontology. That is the insight that drives truthmaker theory, but it can be separated from the chore of understanding the nature of truth itself.[21] As I'll argue later (see Section 6.2), truthmaking *presupposes* the notion of truth; it doesn't explicate it. Ontology-first truthmaking takes the notion of truth for granted, and then investigates what implications it has for ontology. As a result, those compelled by deflationary theories of truth have nothing to fear in the theory of truthmaking, once it is freed from its historical connection to the job of explaining the nature of truth itself.

Ontology-first truthmaker theorists, I hasten to add, need not completely disavow the language of explanation (and related terminology like "because" and "in virtue of"); they are free to call instances of truthmaking "explanations" of truth if they choose. Doing so is in perfect harmony with the pluralistic nature of explanation. But this sense of explanation must be understood not to carry any implications beyond what the ontology-first paradigm is committed to; it is not a weapon with which to criticize various truthmaker accounts as being insufficiently explanatory.[22]

[21] I elaborate on this point in section 4.5 of Asay 2013b.

[22] For explanatory truthmaking on the offense in this way, see Sanson and Caplan 2010 and Griffith 2013.

2.3 Truthmaking and Ontological Commitment

By defending truthmaking as a form of ontological accounting, I might be thought to be offering what is called a theory or "criterion" of ontological commitment. After all, I am agreeing with Armstrong that to embrace a comprehensive account of truthmakers is to embrace a metaphysics, an ontology. And Armstrong, *qua* advocate of truthmaking, is regularly thought of as offering a competing account of ontological commitment to Quine's canonical view, which I discussed in the Introduction (e.g., Pickel and Mantegani 2012: 3). Whereas the Quinean view is that one is ontologically committed to whatever is existentially quantified over in one's fully regimented final theory, Armstrong's is that one is committed to whatever the truthmakers are for that final theory. Though even Armstrong himself believes that he is breaking with Quine's view by adopting truthmaker theory (Armstrong 2004: 23–24), I contend that there needn't be any substantial disagreement between the Quinean about ontological commitment and the truthmaker theorist. Truthmaker theory needn't offer anything by way of a criterion of ontological commitment, though it is true that one is ontologically committed to all and only those things that one takes to be truthmakers.

The idea of a criterion of ontological commitment is that there is a way to determine one's ontology by attending to particular features of the theory that one holds about the world. For Quine, to be is to be the value of a variable: "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). On this view, one is ontologically committed to anything one quantifies over: if you think there are numbers, then you are ontologically committed to numbers. One important dimension of Quine's position that needs to be kept in mind is that one's ontological commitments should only be read off a *regimented* theory that one accepts. One undertakes ontological commitments only in theoretical contexts, not by way of ordinary, vernacular language (1953: 106–107, 1981: 9).

By way of comparison, consider Jody Azzouni's alternative theory of ontological commitment (2004). For Azzouni, quantification is not the mark of ontology. To be is not to be the value of a variable, but to be ontologically independent, where this involves no dependence on any psychological or linguistic process. We can quantify over (and thus speak truthfully about) things such as numbers and fictional characters, though we need not thereby accept that they are ontologically independent. In this

way, we can embrace mathematical truth without ontologically committing to mathematical entities. (I return to this view in Section 11.2.)

Does truthmaker theory offer yet another view about ontological commitment? Cameron thinks so (2008c, 2010b; cf. Rettler 2016). But I don't believe it does. It's easy to appreciate why one might think that, however. Take a case where some particular object *a* contingently instantiates some universal F. For the Quinean, the only *thing* that the truth <*a* is F> ontologically commits one to is something in one's ontology that falls under the predicate "is F." In short, it commits you to *a*. But Armstrong rejects the claim that *a* is a truthmaker for <*a* is F>, as *a* could exist and yet <*a* is F> be false.[23] (This argument will be covered in greater detail in Section 3.2.) What's needed is not just the universal F, but a state of affairs that brings them together. Hence, <*a* is F>'s truth requires there to be a state of affairs – what we might label "*a*'s being F" – and so to commit to its truth requires an ontological commitment to a state of affairs. Armstrong concludes: "The great advantage, as I see it, of the search for truthmakers is that it focuses us not merely on the metaphysical implications of the subject terms of propositions but also on their predicates" (2004: 23). Quine, by contrast, "has stacked the ontological deck against predicates as opposed to subject terms" (Armstrong 2004: 23).

The supposed dispute in this case seems to be: is <*a* is F> ontologically committed to just *a*, or to the state of affairs of *a*'s being F? Quineans favor the former view; Armstrongians the latter. I think this is an unhelpful way of viewing the matter. There is a more straightforward claim that Quineans and Armstrongians disagree about that doesn't invoke the idea of ontological commitment: does the state of affairs of *a*'s being F exist? Nothing prevents the Armstrongian from conceding that while <*a* is F> is not itself ontologically committed to any state of affairs, <*a*'s being F exists> very much is. And the latter claim is arrived at by way of metaphysical argument, not reflection on the relationship between linguistic meaning and ontological commitment. The Quinean might think that such metaphysical arguments are pointless, or unsound; but if so, *that* is the focus of disagreement with the truthmaker theorist. The issue is not criteria of ontological commitment.

[23] Does the *Quinean* think that *a* is a truthmaker for <*a* is F>? I don't think so. Quine himself doesn't talk in terms of truthmaking. And anyone who accepted it as a truthmaker would have to reject the orthodox view that truthmaking requires necessitation (see Chapter 3). As I shall explain, I don't think a Quinean about ontological commitments is committed to anything vis-à-vis truthmaking.

Recall that for the Quinean, ontological commitments are only discoverable post-regimentation. That is to say, the Quinean must provide a regimented theory, which is a suitable transformation of the things believed to be true in one's nonregimented language, if one is to express one's ontological commitments. The transformation of a theory via regimentation is not metaphysically neutral. One set of considerations that can inform what goes on during a regimentation is the set of truthmaking considerations. Maybe accepting that *a* is F in and of itself does not compel one to quantify over a state of affairs in one's regimented theory, but perhaps it does in conjunction with the various metaphysical considerations and arguments that speak to the reasons we might, at the end of the day, need to believe in universals and/or states of affairs. In short, the reason that truthmaker theorists believe in the entities they do is because they think such entities are needed to account for what they take to be true, not because what they take to be true is ontologically committed to them, by way of their semantics.

At the end of the day, nothing prevents the Armstrongian about truthmakers from accepting that $<a$ is F$>$ is not ontologically committed to a state of affairs, and nothing prevents the Quinean about ontological commitment from accepting that there is a state of affairs of *a*'s being F. Thus, I find it preferable to think of the dispute here as not being over what the criterion of ontological commitment is, but rather over whether certain entities exist, and the soundness of the arguments that defend or oppose their existence. Put differently: Armstrong and Quine disagree as to whether the final regimentation needs to quantify over states of affairs. They don't need to disagree about the connection between quantification and ontological commitment. Truthmaker theorists are free to adopt whichever criteria of ontological commitment they think are correct, but are not in the business of offering such criteria themselves.[24]

What I think truthmaker theorists who see themselves as offering an alternative to Quine's criterion of ontological commitment are resisting is not so much Quine's criterion, but the conception of ontological investigation that it might be thought to suggest. We start with truths we all agree on: *a* is F. The Quinean, supposedly, looks at the domain of quantification, finds

[24] Schaffer argues that truthmaker commitments are "parasitic" on quantifier commitments (2008b: 16). I agree with him that truthmaker commitments shouldn't be seen as a replacement for quantifier commitments (and for some of the same reasons), but I resist the suggestion that truthmaker theorists must accept that one is ontologically committed to everything one quantifies over. A truthmaker theorist could agree with Azzouni, for instance, and think that the locus of ontological commitment falls to a predicate, say, rather than the quantifiers.

a and nothing more, and leaves matters there. This is an "easy" methodology for ontology, one that requires no metaphysical argument, just linguistic analysis. (I believe this concern is behind Cameron's complaint against the Quinean that "serious ontological questions are being decided by linguistic facts" [2008c: 5].) The truthmaker theorist, contrastingly, engages in questions about what makes it true that *a* is F, and ultimately lands on states of affairs, tropes, objects under counterpart relations, or what have you. This is "difficult" ontological theorizing, something left unsettled by reflection on the linguistic structure of the initial truth.

I reject this "easy" method to ontology, as it dismisses out of hand the cogency of all the arguments made in the name of truthmaker theory. (Metaphysical questions about the truthmakers for counterfactuals and negative existentials, for example, are not solved simply by forcing the claims into first-order logic, assuming that's even possible.) I'm not sure it's Quine's methodology, though. This is not the place for Quine exegesis, but this description of how to do ontology leaves out the regimentation process. We start with the truths we believe, but we only read off our ontological commitments from the truths in our duly regimented theory. As I stressed, the process of regimentation is not metaphysically neutral, and truthmaking considerations can play their role in that transformation. What I suggest both Quineans and truthmaker theorists resist is the thought that settling the ontological commitments of some particular sentence of natural language settles all the metaphysical questions in the neighborhood. Ontology must be approached more holistically – surely a thesis the Quinean will happily subscribe to – and truthmaking considerations have their role to play in that broader enterprise.

I do not intend to take a stand on what the true criterion of ontological commitment is. Hence, I am not interested in answering the question "What are my ontological commitments, given that I believe that *p*?" for any *p*. (I take Rettler 2016, for instance, to be answering this question.) Rather, I am interested in exploring what sort of ontology serves as the most theoretically virtuous set of accounting books for a given body of truths. Ontological accounting in this sense is a global project – it's in search of the right equilibrium between our beliefs on the whole and our ontological inventories.[25] I reject the view that ontology is relevant only to

[25] Hence, the ontological accounting perspective nicely harmonizes with the perspective of "supervenience theorists" like Bigelow (1988) and (some time-slices of) Lewis (1992, 2001b), which emphasizes how truth as a whole needs to supervene on all of reality. I return to this point in Section 4.1.

regimented theories. I do not speak an artificial regimented language, and the arguments in this book are in English; yet I do not find that to be a devastating limitation on the project of ontology. I am sympathetic with Azzouni's view (2007) that nothing in vernacular language is, by way of its semantics, ontologically committing. Hence, claims that there is something, or even that something *exists*, are not *semantically* entangled with ontology. We might use "there is" and "there exists" when expressing our ontological commitments, but we successfully do so only in virtue of the pragmatics and context of those utterances. I am sympathetic with Azzouni's view here because I don't believe it's contradictory to say, for instance, that there are things that don't exist, like unicorns.[26] But I do find myself tending to use quantified expressions with the intention of communicating ontological commitments – I am a product of early twenty-first century Anglo-American philosophy. Context should clearly communicate when I am making ontologically loaded claims. Where the issue is particularly crucial – such as in the philosophy of mathematics (explored in Chapter 11) – proper care will be taken.

Going forward, in speaking of ontological commitments I intend to be talking about the members of one's ontological inventory. The phrase is not meant to refer to the "quantifier commitments" of any particular claim. My guiding methodological belief about metaphysics is that determining one's ontological commitments is a project usefully pursued in the context of truthmaking. So I do believe that by figuring out what truthmakers there need to be, one figures out what one's ontological commitments are. But none of this touches on the issue of a criterion for ontological commitment, and is strictly speaking neutral with respect to the competing views offered by Quine, Azzouni, and others.[27]

[26] I do raise criticisms against Azzouni's view in Asay 2010.

[27] For more on the relationship between truthmaking and ontological commitment, see Simons 1997, Smith and Simon 2007: 89–90, and Gill 2012.

CHAPTER 3

The Truthmaking Relation

The purpose of the previous chapter's foray into the two perspectives on truthmaking was to shed light on the two fundamental questions facing truthmaker theorists: what is it to be a truthmaker, and which truths need them? Getting clear on truthmaking's *ontological* focus (as opposed to an *alethic* focus on the explanation of truth) is paramount for developing the best view about what a truthmaker actually is. The main implication for this chapter is that the recent drift toward hyperintensional, explanatory notions of truthmaking has been unnecessary. The cost of accepting a simple necessitation account of truthmaking is enticingly minimal.

3.1 The Simple Account

The truthmaking relation is the one that obtains between a truth-bearer and an object in the world. That much virtually everyone can agree upon. It is also common now to claim that truthmakers are the objects in the world *in virtue of which* truth-bearers are true, that truth-bearers are true *because* of the existence of their truthmakers. This language strongly suggests the explanatory picture of truthmaking I challenged in the previous chapter. As a result, I do not lean heavily on this way of speaking, as it can lead one astray from truthmaking's ontological focus. (As already noted, I do not completely object to the language, and theorists such as Bigelow (1988: 125) use it in a similarly "lightweight" way.) Another familiar starting point for thinking about the truthmaking relation is the more neutral idea that truthmakers *guarantee* the truth of the things they make true, or that truthmakers *necessitate* the truth of the things they make true. The goal of this section is to clarify this idea, and provide an account of how we should understand the truthmaking relation.

Note that I do not say that the truthmaking relation obtains between a truthmaker and the *truth* of a truth-bearer; rather it is the truth-bearer itself that stands in the relation. The primary reason for this is that I do not

take "the truth of a truth-bearer" to refer to anything. There are no tropes or universals corresponding to the property of truth. Truth is a merely "abundant" property, to borrow the language of Lewis (1983). There is, therefore, no such thing as a state of affairs (in Armstrong's sense, as a non-mereological composite of a particular and universal) that pulls together a truth-bearer and the property of truth. As I have argued elsewhere (Asay 2014) and discuss below (see Section 6.1), this *metaphysically deflationary* perspective on the property of truth is the most natural view for truthmaker theorists to adopt. As a result, it is truth-bearers themselves that are made true by the objects of the world. To speak of "the truth of a truth-bearer" is at best a misleading way of referring to a true truth-bearer as being true.

Similarly, I maintain that objects themselves stand in the relation, not the *existence* of those objects. For again, "the existence of an object" appears to be an empty expression, referring to nothing. To suppose otherwise is to commit to existence being a substantive, sparse property. Perhaps it is, but it is not my current business to defend that controversial thesis. Truthmaker theory does not require it any more than it requires a commitment to a substantive, sparse property of truth. Hence, on the view I recommend, to say that *x* makes *y* true is to say that *x* and *y* themselves stand in the truthmaking relation; it is not to say that the relation obtains between the *existence* of *x* and the *truth* of *y*.

With these preliminaries out of the way, let's investigate the nature of the truthmaking relation. Alongside current orthodoxy, I argue that necessitation is necessary for truthmaking. But I also defend the view, now heterodox, that it is sufficient as well. This is the "simple" necessitation approach to truthmaking that I shall adopt.[1]

In the early days of truthmaker theory, the more or less assumed view was that metaphysical necessitation was both necessary and sufficient for truthmaking.[2] According to this view, what it is for *x* to be a truthmaker for *y* is for it to be metaphysically necessary that if *x* exists, then *y* is true. The existence of *x*, in other words, must necessarily be sufficient for the truth of *y*. The advantages of this simple account are striking. First, necessitation being a necessary condition of truthmaking helps to account for the sense in which a truthmaker is providing proper ontological accounting for the truth in question. Suppose necessitation were false.

[1] A fellow current heretic is Angere 2015.

[2] See, e.g., Fox 1987, Bigelow 1988: 125 and 128, Lewis 2001a, 2001b, and 2003, and Chrudzimski 2002; it's arguably implicit in Armstrong (1997: 115 and 2000: 150) as well.

If so, there could be a case where *x* is a truthmaker for *y*, even though *x*'s existing is consistent with *y*'s being false. In other words, some possibilities with *x* include *y* being true, and some possibilities with *x* include *y* being false. But if *x* provides no guarantee that *y* is even true, then it's unclear how *x* itself can give sufficient grounds for the truth of *y*. Something else besides *x* appears to determine whether or not *y* comes out true. That something else, then, appears to be the better candidate truthmaker (possibly in conjunction with *x*).[3]

The second advantage of the simple account is that it renders the truthmaking relation completely modal: it defines it in terms of necessity, and leaves out any appeal to hyperintensional notions such as essence, dependence, etc. This advantage, however, is thought by most nowadays to be its major downfall (e.g., Smith 1999). The problem, first articulated by Greg Restall (1996), is that the sufficiency of necessitation leads to far too liberal truthmaking.[4] Take any necessary truth, such as <8 is greater than 4>. It's necessary that if the Grand Canyon exists, then <8 is greater than 4> is true. Necessary truths are true regardless of what exists, and so anything that actually exists metaphysically necessitates all necessary truths. However, few believe that the Grand Canyon is a truthmaker for <8 is greater than 4>. There are other sorts of counter-examples, discussed below, which turn on necessary connections between contingent truths. Hence, the current orthodoxy in truthmaker theory is that metaphysical necessitation is not sufficient for truthmaking.

Given the various challenges that have been made to both the necessity and sufficiency of necessitation for truthmaking, the defender of the simple necessitation position has some work to do. Below, I take up the defense of each dimension in turn.[5]

3.2 The Necessity of Necessitation

While the sufficiency of necessitation has routinely been rejected, its necessity is typically accepted, though not universally. Those who reject necessitation outright tend to do so in response to the case of negative and

[3] See Bigelow 1988: 126, Armstrong 1997: 116, and 2004: 6–7, and Pagès 2005. Cameron criticizes this argument (2008d: 109–112), as do Green (2009), Stenwall (2010), and Briggs (2012).

[4] Brower-Toland (2006) identifies a similar objection in the writings of the late medieval philosopher Adam Wodeham.

[5] In so doing, I inoculate myself against Tallant's assault on truthmaking, for he admits that all of his arguments turn on interpreting the truthmaking relation as an "in virtue of" or "grounding" relation, in line with the explanation-first outlook (2018: 27, n. 8).

general truths (e.g., Pendlebury 1986, Simons 1992, Mellor 2003, and Briggs 2012).[6] Consider, for example, <There are no purple pandas'> and <All wild pandas' in 1970 live in China>. As for the former, one might say that the set (or, perhaps, mereological sum) of every existing panda makes it true. After all, nothing within that set is a purple panda, and the set includes all the pandas'. Yet it's possible that that very set (or sum) could exist alongside purple pandas'. In such a scenario, that set wouldn't be the exhaustive set of pandas', but it would still be identical to the set of pandas' that in fact exist. If the set is the truthmaker, it's not a necessitating one. Similarly, one might take <All wild pandas' in 1970 live in China> to be made true by the set or sum of all the states of affairs of the individual wild pandas' living in China in 1970. For example, suppose that Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing had been the only wild pandas' left in 1970, before they were captured and sent to the United States. One might take the state of affairs of Ling-Ling's living in China in 1970 and the state of affairs of Hsing-Hsing's living in China in 1970 to collectively make true <All wild pandas' in 1970 live in China>. They are, after all, the only wild pandas', and they both live in China. But these states of affairs do not necessitate the truth of <All wild pandas' in 1970 live in China>. For it's possible that alongside Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing living in China, there were other wild pandas' living in, say, Myanmar. So the state of affairs of Ling-Ling's and Hsing-Hsing's living in China in 1970 does not by itself necessitate that all wild pandas' in 1970 lived in China. In essence, to deny the necessity of necessitation for this reason is to say that a general truth is made true by what *in fact* makes true its instances, even though those things do not guarantee the general truth in question.

Denying necessitation is not a particularly popular view; Merricks describes taking necessitation to be a necessary condition of truthmaking as "truthmaker orthodoxy" (2007: 5; see also Cameron 2008d: 107, Schaffer 2008b: 10, and Goff 2010).[7] Following Armstrong (2004), I shall refer to this view as simply "necessitarianism." But what is the best argument for it? I believe that the strongest defense for necessitarianism

[6] See also Parsons (1999), who rejects necessitarianism (which he calls "truthmaker essentialism") in response to the case of contingent predications. Other non-necessitarians include Heil 2000, R. P. Cameron 2005, Parsons 2005, Miyoshi 2007, Schaffer 2010, and Stenwall 2010. Griffith (2015a) rejects necessitarianism only for negative truths. Mellor (2009: 290) later changes his mind, and takes negative and general truths to be truthmaker gaps.

[7] Here is but a sampling of truthmaker theorists (and their opponents) who accept it: Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Fox 1987, Armstrong 1997 and 2004, Williamson 1999: 254, Molnar 2000: 84, Read 2000: 67, Dodd 2002a: 71, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006b: 961, Fiocco 2013: 3, and Jago 2018.

emerges when we consider one problematic consequence of the opposing position.[8] Assuming the falsity of necessitation, it is a contingent matter whether an object makes true some truth-bearer, and this leads to potentially undermining results. That is to say, the very facts about truthmaking spell trouble for the non-necessitarian.[9] Supposing the falsity of necessitarianism, even if some object *x* in fact makes true some truth-bearer *y*, it's possible that *x* could have existed even though *y* had been false. Had *y* been false, then *x* would not have been a truthmaker for it, for *y* wouldn't have been true. Hence, even after presupposing the existence of *x*, it's a contingent fact that *x* is a truthmaker for *y*, since it might not have been. The anti-necessitarian faces the following question: what makes it true that *x* is a truthmaker for *y*? *Y* is itself a contingent fact, made true by *x*. But that *x* is a truthmaker for *y* is itself another contingent fact, and thus one that must now be addressed by the anti-necessitarian. For example, supposing that Ling-Ling's and Hsing-Hsing's both living in China in 1970 makes it true that all wild pandas in 1970 live in China, what makes this truthmaking fact true? We know that their living in China doesn't by itself guarantee the truth of <All wild pandas in 1970 live in China>. So what accounts for why their geographical location is relevant to the truth of the general claim in question? The obvious fact is that, in this scenario, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing are the only wild pandas. Their being located where they are is the truthmaker only because they are the only wild pandas. If they hadn't been the only wild pandas, the states of affairs involving their locations wouldn't have been the truthmaker for <All wild pandas in 1970 live in China>, even if it were still true. Hence, whether or not Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing's living in China is a truthmaker for <All wild pandas in 1970 live in China> is contingent upon whether or not Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing are all the pandas there are. Recognizing this fact, the necessitarian builds the truthmaker for <Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing are the only wild pandas> into the truthmaker for <All wild pandas in 1970 live in China>, and moves on. The anti-necessitarian, by contrast, embarks upon an infinite chain of contingent facts about truthmaking, each presumably in need of its own truthmaker.

[8] Armstrong argues for necessitarianism along the lines I offered in the previous section (2004: 6–7; see also Bigelow 1988: 126), though his critics frequently take it to either beg the question or rely on false premises (Cameron 2008d: 111, Green 2009: 194, Stenwall 2010: 218, and 2017: 2984, Briggs 2012: 22). Jago also argues for necessitarianism (2018: 85).

[9] I develop this line of argument more fully in Asay 2016a. See Bennett (2011) for a similar view in connection with grounding.

The upshot is that anti-necessitarians, as soon as they commit to a truthmaking claim, are faced with a truthmaking question for the original truthmaking claim. If *x* makes *y* true, what makes it true that *x* makes *y* true? If that inquiry is answered with a further object *z*, then the question emerges as to what makes it true that *z* makes it true that *x* makes *y* true? If truthmaking facts are themselves contingent, they launch a regress of further truthmaking questions. The necessitarian faces no such regress. Suppose *x* makes *y* true, but as a matter of necessitation. Then it's impossible for *x* to exist and *y* to be false. It's now open to the necessitarian to maintain that what is responsible for the truth of <*x* makes *y* true> is nothing above *x* and *y* themselves. To think of truthmaking in this way is to treat it as in *internal* relation, to borrow Armstrong's terminology (2004: 50).[10] Truthmaking is internal to *x* and *y* in the sense that necessarily, if they exist, they stand in the truthmaking relation. Similarly, the relation *being greater than* is internal to 6 and 8, in that they cannot exist without 8 being greater than 6. Taking truthmaking to be an internal relation is a strictly stronger thesis than necessitarianism. One might take *x* to guarantee the truth of *y* without also guaranteeing the truth of <*x* makes *y* true>. But it is a natural addition, and one unavailable to the anti-necessitarian. As a result, all the "*n*-order" truthmaking facts (e.g., that *w* makes it true that *x* makes it true that *y* makes *z* true) are settled at the first order. If *x* makes *y* true, *x* and *y* together can make true all the infinitely many truthmaking claims related to the initial case. Anti-necessitarians do not enjoy this luxury; if *x* makes *y* true, it's a further fact, not settled by *x* and *y*, as to what makes it the case that *x* makes *y* true. As we saw in the case of general truths, it's something outside the parties to the truthmaking relation that accounts for why they stand inside it, and that's what generates the regress.

The point of the foregoing argument is to show that necessitarianism better speaks to the basic idea of truthmaking. Truthmaker theorists are looking for the proper ontological basis for something being true. If the basis offered doesn't yet ensure that the claim in question is true, then the truthmaking inquiry isn't finished yet: something else needs to be said. Truthmaking is ontological accounting, and the accounting isn't complete if the truthmaking claims themselves are still up in the air. The further questions that face anti-necessitarians are just part of the original

[10] See Stenwall (2016) for an argument that truthmaker internalism is inconsistent with taking propositions to be mind-dependent. See also David 2005.

truthmaking inquiry. Only necessitating truthmakers fully capture truthmaking's desire to properly ground truth in ontology.[11]

Thus, I defend necessitation as a necessary condition of truthmaking; this is one piece of the puzzle that orthodoxy gets right. Is it sufficient? That question proves to be far more difficult, and I turn to it now.

3.3 The Sufficiency of Necessitation

Requiring necessitation speaks to truthmaking's need to account for the *truth* of truth-bearers, and not their other features. If an object doesn't establish the truth of some claim, then it doesn't deserve to be thought of as a truthmaker for that claim. But is necessitation enough? There are abundant counterexamples that have been offered in the efforts to show that it's not. Plus, there is a danger that if there is nothing more to truthmaking than necessitation, then triviality looms. My defense of the sufficiency of necessitation responds to each sort of counterexample that has been offered, and then addresses the worry about triviality.

3.3.1 Purported Counterexamples

Necessary truths are the most familiar kind of counterexample to the sufficiency of necessitation. The Grand Canyon necessitates <7 + 5 = 12>. So does every other existing object. Since <7 + 5 = 12> is necessarily true, it's necessary that if the Grand Canyon exists, then <7 + 5 = 12> is true. But, so the thought goes, the Grand Canyon is no truthmaker for the truths of arithmetic. The argument behind the verdicts drawn in these cases comes down to relevance.[12] The necessitators in question are irrelevant to the truths at stake. Modally speaking, everything lines up correctly. Every possibility with the Grand Canyon is one where seven and five add up to twelve. But proper modal alignment is not sufficient to capture the idea of truthmaking, or so says the orthodoxy. Truthmaking is an attempt to capture the proper grounds for truths. Not just anything will do: truthmaker theorists seek what it is in reality in virtue of which certain claims are true. Mathematical truths have nothing to do with geological formations, and so looking to the latter doesn't enable us to understand or account for the former.

[11] Cf. Molnar 2000: 84.

[12] It is valuable to recognize that the judgments drawn about these cases can be *argued* for; they are not brute appeals to intuition, whatever that might mean. As with truthmaker theory, so with much else in philosophy (see Deutsch 2015).

The upshot for most truthmaker theorists is that a purely modal account of the truthmaking relation is insufficient. If truthmaking calls for relevance, then it must be some sort of hyperintensional notion. The fact that every possibility with some object is a possibility where some claim is true is not enough to establish that the object is responsible for the truth. As a result, theorists have supplemented metaphysical necessitation in various ways in order to develop a hyperintensional account of the truthmaking relation. Trenton Merricks advocates the notion of *aboutness*, maintaining that *x* is a truthmaker for *y* only if *y* is about *x* (2007: 26).[13] E. J. Lowe defends the view that truthmaking is a matter of *essential dependence*, such that *x* is a truthmaker for *y* only if it is a feature of *y*'s essence that it should be true if *x* exists (2005, 2007, 2009). Barry Smith (1999) introduces the notion of a proposition's "projection."[14] Jonathan Schaffer (2010) subsumes the truthmaking relation under his notion of grounding (about which more in Section 5.4), which is understood hyperintensionally. In this way, each of these authors attempts to bypass the problem raised by necessary truths and other examples.

There is no universal consensus on the right moral to draw from the case of necessary truths. David Lewis recognizes that truthmaking as necessitation "applies only trivially to necessary truths," but offers no judgment as to whether that is a bad result (2001b: 604). Many writers see no problem with trivializing truthmakers for necessary truths. Michael Veber, taking his cue from Quine (1970: 96), asks: "Since necessary truths are true anywhere and everywhere, why not say that they are made true by anything and everything?" (Veber 2008: 82). Similarly, Ray Briggs writes that "Necessary truths are exceptionally easy to make true: absolutely anything will do the job" (2012: 15). Greg Restall, a focal point in discussions about the triviality objection, suggests that "There is something quite touching in the view that every particle in the universe (and everything else besides!) is witness to all necessary truths" (1996: 333).[15]

Nevertheless, it is probable that the majority of truthmaker theorists find the triviality objectionable. Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra proclaims that it is "obvious" that necessary truths are not made true by each and every object, because they are not true in virtue of those objects (2006b: 960;

[13] See also Smith 1999: 279, Künne 2003: 158, and Schipper 2018; see Schaffer 2008a and McDaniel 2011: 207–210 for criticism.

[14] For criticism and further discussion of Smith's view, see Gregory 2001, Smith 2002, and Schnieder 2006a.

[15] See also Robinson 2000: 148, Chrudzimski 2002, Heathcote 2003, Gibb 2006: 177, and Mellor 2009: 284.

cf. 2000: 262, and 2002b: 33). Alex Baia declares the result "bizarre" (2012: 342), and Fraser MacBride finds it counterintuitive (2005: 119). Armstrong believes that the trivialization is problematic, as it "robs truthmaking theory of all interest for the case of necessary truths" (2004: 11; see also 2000: 150). Jonathan Schaffer declares that "There are substantive truthmaking issues for necessary truths" (2010: 320). E. J. Lowe announces his desire to "avoid the unwanted implication that the truthmaking relation is utterly indiscriminate where necessary truths are concerned" (2007: 250–251). Mark Jago thinks that the triviality result is "highly implausible at best" (2018: 178).

Perhaps more than anyone else, Trenton Merricks has offered concrete arguments for why truthmaker theorists should take the threat of triviality seriously. Merricks maintains that to accept "trivial truthmakers" for a truth is tantamount to accepting that it has no truthmaker whatsoever: "a 'trivial truthmaker' is not really a truthmaker at all" (2007: 24). Therefore, accepting trivial truthmakers for necessities is to concede that they are truthmaker gaps, and Merricks finds such truths to be intrinsically problematic for truthmaker theory. Truthmaker theory that eschews maximalism, according to Merricks, relinquishes its main theoretical motivation and gives up its ability to "catch cheaters." I disagree that there are such costs to nonmaximalism, as will become clear in the next chapter. Merricks's strongest argument concerns necessary truths for which genuine truthmakers would seem to be required, on anyone's view: truths that concern necessary existence. I shall come to such cases shortly.

For a large swath of necessary truths, I suggest that it is perfectly plausible that they lack relevant truthmakers. That is to say, offering a "trivial" truthmaker for them (or none at all) is theoretically sufficient, considering the aims of ontology-first truthmaker theory. A necessary truth would seem to be a truth that is true regardless of how the world is. It is not contingent: its truth-value does not depend on what is going on in the world. Change the world however you like and necessary truths remain true. That being so, it's unclear how such truths can make any difference to ontology. It's true that if something is white, then something is white. No entity in reality seems to be responsible for this truth; we don't need anything white, and we don't need anything that's not white. Presumably, the claim would be true even if there were no entities. To say that a truth requires a truthmaker is to say that it cannot be true unless something of the right sort exists. But what sort of thing is it that is needed to show that <If snow is white, then snow is white> is true? Necessary truths of this sort are ontologically indifferent: they have no dependence on ontology,

and they do not constrain our ontology in any way. Accepting that they have no truthmaker (or that, trivially, anything makes them true) is no problematic consequence for ontology-first truthmaking.

It is understandable why necessary truths are thought to require non-trivial truthmakers when the topic is approached from the explanation-first perspective. (Hence it is no surprise that Rodriguez-Pereyra takes such cases to be "obvious" counterexamples.) If the truth of <If snow is white, then snow is white> is taken to be an ontological *explanandum*, then we need to find an appropriate ontological *explanans* for it. If to be true is just to be answerable to truthmaking investigation, then of course necessary truths need truthmakers, and "relevant" ones at that. No one specifically inquiring into the explanation of the truth of <If penguins waddle then penguins waddle> would accept the existence of the largest compost heap in Ohio as an appropriate answer. But once truthmaking is freed from the explanatory constraint, there is no longer any push to see necessary truths of this sort as motivating substantive ontological investigation. What is distinctive about so many necessary truths is how indifferent they are to ontology.

Some necessary truths, however, may not seem so indifferent to ontology. These are the truths (if any such there be) that implicate necessary beings (if any such there be). Suppose it's true that God exists, and necessarily so. If so, then every rotting avocado in a landfill somewhere necessitates <God exists>. It's one thing to say that a rotting avocado is a truthmaker for <If snow is white then snow is white>, but quite another to say that it's a truthmaker for <God exists>. For this latter claim does not at all appear to be ontologically indifferent. If true, it would require a very strong and novel ontological commitment; nothing contingent would suffice. Mathematical truths might also be examples. On a Platonist view (e.g., Wright 1983), mathematical truths are made true by mind-independently existing mathematical entities, which presumably are necessary if they exist at all. <2 is prime> is made true by the necessarily existing Platonic number 2. If Platonists have the right metaphysical story about mathematical truth, then truthmaking as necessitation is in trouble.

We need to be careful, however, not to assume that all potential necessary beings belong to the same camp. Some philosophers (e.g., Rayo 2009, 2013) draw a distinction between *trivial* and *substantive* existence. A trivially existing object is one that can't help but exist, given the way we think and speak of such objects. Think of Carnap's (1950) view that existential mathematical statements are analytically true, or Thomasson's view (1999) that fictional characters must exist, given no more than the

way we conceptualize what a fictional character is. Necessarily existing supernatural beings, if they exist, presumably enjoy substantive existence. So do Platonic numbers, if they exist. But numbers might not be Platonic entities, if Rayo or Carnap is correct. Perhaps other purported necessary beings, such as propositions, can similarly be given a trivialist treatment. Where existence is trivial, the ontological accountant's work is finished: one can "add" trivially existing entities to one's ontology at no cost. So the only potentially worrying cases for the simple necessitation account are ones that involve substantive necessary existence.[16]

There are a number of further responses I am inclined to give to such cases. Ultimately I suspect that Hume (via Cleanthes) provided the right response: "Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as nonexistent. ... The words, therefore, *necessary existence*, have no meaning" (Hume 1993: 91–92). I would say: whatever we conceive as *nontrivially* existent, we can also conceive as nonexistent. Although Hume, for the purposes of rebutting the ontological argument for God's existence, was "willing to rest the whole controversy upon" this argument (1993: 91–92), I shall not be quite so bold. Nor shall I rest content with Hume's authority, though I am happy to voice my suspicion that the very idea of nontrivial necessary existence may be incoherent. But we should recognize that all the standard examples of necessarily existing entities (God, numbers, propositions) are ontologically contentious, to say the least. Of course, *every* entity is controversial to at least some ontologist or other; such is metaphysics. But these examples are particularly suspect – skepticism about them comes from many different directions (and not just, say, from mereological nihilism). Plus, the trivialist shows how some of these necessary entities, even if they exist, pose no threat to the simple necessitation account. Hence, the difficult counterexamples to the sufficiency of necessitation for truthmaking are all, at best, *potential* counterexamples. What's unclear is if there are any actual counterexamples of this variety. There would be, if theists, say, are correct, but such examples depend on highly controversial metaphysical stances. That said, it would be desirable for my view not to depend on the falsity of various live metaphysical views in the philosophies of religion, language, and mathematics.

Here, then, is my proposed strategy. When it comes to truthmaking for contingent truths, truthmaking as necessitation *works*. It gets the job done, viewed from the perspective of ontology-first truthmaking. No one who

[16] I return to the topic of trivial existence in Chapters 11 and 12 in connection with mathematical objects and fictional characters.

pursues truthmaking for contingent truths equipped with the simple necessitation account fails to do good ontological accounting. That point first emerged when it was revealed that debates over, say, the conjunction principle are rendered moot by the ontology-first paradigm. To fully make good on this claim, I need to meet the potential counterexamples involving purely contingent truths, and this I do below. When it comes to ontology-indifferent necessary truths (including any truths about trivially existing necessary entities, if there are any), there is no harm in saying, as the necessitation account does, that all entities make them true. Saying so offers no illumination into *why* necessary truths are true, but that, I've been arguing, is not the goal of truthmaker theory. Finally, when it comes to necessary truths with apparent ontological implications (assuming there are any), necessitation will be of no help. But that doesn't mean that truthmaker theorists have nothing to say. For theists, presumably God is the truthmaker for <God exists>, and for Platonists, Platonic numbers are the truthmakers for the truths of mathematics. For these views, the relationship between truth and truthmaker in these cases will go beyond necessitation, and I leave it to such theorists to explain what is going on here.[17] For my purposes, I am not defending theism, and I defend a view of mathematical truth that does not require Platonic entities (see Chapter 11). Hence, the question of what else beyond necessitation helps account for the truthmaking between substantive necessary truth and substantive necessary being has no relevance in what follows. Nothing I argue turns on there being nontrivial necessary beings.

One might object here that I've missed the point about the counterexamples, potential though they may be. Suppose <God exists> is necessarily true, and made true by God alone, and not any contingent entity. What that shows is that there is more to truthmaking than necessitation, even in nonproblematic cases. Truthmaking *is* necessitation plus something else; call it "X." That means that truthmaking in contingent cases is also necessitation plus X. The best way to articulate my response here is to point out that my perspective is intended to be somewhat subversive, metaphysically speaking. I'm downplaying any interest in facts about when, *really*, the truthmaking relation does or doesn't obtain. I'm interested in a method that will result in good ontological accounting. I'm not interested in uncovering some sort of "alethic structure" to reality.

[17] My suggestion is that such theorists develop an account of metaphysical necessitation that invokes the resources of relevance logic, but without thinking of the relevance constraint in terms of explanation. Thanks go to Sam Baron and Ray Briggs for pushing me on this point.

The attitude I've adopted here is recognizably "pragmatist" – it looks for a relation that "works" and serves the function for which it's used, regardless of whether it's "real" or "fundamental" – and as such might be thought to be an inappropriate infiltration into my metaphysical project. However, my pragmatic perspective is completely kosher, and in line with my basic attitude toward truthmaking. Truthmaking, as I defend it, is a *tool*. It is a tool for answering the ontological question "What is there?"[18] What it is not is a tool for chasing after spontaneous judgments we might make about whether certain objects are "responsible" for the truth of certain truth-bearers. My necessitation account, therefore, tends to be quite liberal in how it spreads around the truthmaking relation. (This will become quite apparent when we turn to the contingent counterexamples.) But this proclivity does not lead to ontological proliferation, which is the important point. Admitting that my oldest nephew is a truthmaker for random logical truths does not bloat my ontology: my nephew is in my ontology anyway, for the contingent truths he necessitates. Claims to the effect that *x* makes *y* true are not attempts to track some sort of deep alethic structure in the world, such that the question of when and where the relation obtains becomes of the first importance. That's the perspective of explanation-first truthmaking, and I've argued against it. Rather, claims concerning truthmaking are calls for keeping us ontologically accountable. When it comes to that goal, truthmaking as necessitation *works* for contingent truths. It doesn't work for substantive necessary truths, but they are not my concern. I doubt there are any. For those who think there are, there are theoretical alternatives available to explore, and I encourage them to do so.

Now that I've shown my pragmatist-infected hand, dealing with purported contingent counterexamples to the sufficiency of necessitation is straightforward. These examples turn on the necessary connections that obtain between contingent entities.[19] Supposing the necessity of origins, Barack Obama, Jr. necessitates <Barack Obama, Sr. exists>. But, so the thought goes, the son does not make it true that the father exists, even if the son's very existence requires it. Again, the issue comes down to relevance. Truths about Obama Sr. should be made true by

[18] Cf. Smith and Simon, who claim that "the true force of the truthmaker idea" is that it is "a valuable type of accessory tool for metaphysical theorizing, rather than as a mere component of the enterprise of defining some single concept or property, however central it might be" (2007: 97).

[19] See Smith 1999: 278, Schnieder 2006a, and Caputo 2007: 279. Simons (2000a) discusses related cases under the name of "alien" truthmakers, but finds no objection in admitting such cases as legitimate instances of truthmaking.

Obama Sr., and truths about Obama Jr. should be made true by Obama Jr. My question is: at what cost comes the concession that President Obama makes <Barack Obama, Sr. exists> true? And the answer is simple: no cost at all. President Obama is not a gratuitous addition to my ontology, for he is needed to make other contingent truths true. And citing the son as the truthmaker for claims about the father does not in any way show that the father is completely dispensable to the truthmaking of *all* truths about him. We'll need him for some truths about him. No one but Obama Sr. can adequately account for the truth of <Barack Obama, Sr. married Ann Dunham in 1961>. For the purposes of properly funding one's ontology, having a truthmaking relation that some might consider too permissive poses no problem. Those who object that Obama Jr. cannot be a truthmaker for <Barack Obama, Sr. exists> because the latter is not true in virtue of the former presuppose the faulty explanation-first account.

It's true that on my account, an ontological commitment to Obama Sr. is not immediately forced by commitment to the truth of <Barack Obama, Sr. exists>; he becomes indispensable only when it comes to other truths. But that is no objection, considering that truthmaking is best understood in a more "holistic" manner anyway.[20] We want our cognitive accounting to be sound: our belief box and our ontological inventory need to be properly coordinated, and this is a global feature of our cognitive accounting.[21] After all, I can cite Obama Jr. as a truthmaker for <Barack Obama, Sr. exists> only because I antecedently believe there to be a necessary connection between father and son, which already betrays my ontological commitment to the father. The "malignant" cases of truthmaking posited by my account are nothing but innocuous extensions of standard truthmaking cases that virtually everyone accepts.

Similar comments apply to the counterexamples Rodriguez-Pereyra offers (but recall that his judgments of these cases are already quite controversial). He contends that the mereological sum of Opus and Jia Jia necessitates <Opus exists>, but does not make it true. Again, I see nothing of importance that is at stake here. Jia Jia finds her way into our

[20] Thanks go to Mark Colyvan for helpfully articulating this dimension of my view.

[21] Hence truthmaker theorists should not be troubled by the question Schaffer (2008b: 14–16) might present here: but which of the many truthmakers for <Barack Obama, Sr. exists> is <Barack Obama, Sr. exists> ontologically committed to? By recognizing the inherent holistic nature of ontological accounting, we obviate the need to offer a specific piecemeal account of what each truth's specific and particular ontological commitments are.

ontology via other truths, but once she's there she causes no harm by being claimed to be part of a truthmaker for other truths, including ones she has nothing to do with. There is no in-principle *ontological* disagreement between myself and Rodriguez-Pereyra. We may well disagree on whether there is an objective alethic structure to the world that is indispensable for explaining truth; I've argued against the need for positing such a structure already. Perhaps ironically, I find that thinking clearly about truthmakers is the best antidote to believing that there is any need for such structure. (I elaborate more on this point in Chapter 6.)

There is no harm, I maintain, in embracing a necessitation account of truthmaking. In no way does it interfere with the ontological ambitions of truthmaker theory. It's true that there remains an open question regarding what to say about truthmaking in the case of substantive necessary truths.[22] It's controversial whether or not there are any such cases, and later on I offer an alternative way of thinking about one such set of candidate truths, the mathematical ones. I do not deny that it can sound odd to maintain that Barack Obama, Jr. makes it true that Barack Obama, Sr. exists. But it's clear why, given one's background views about necessary connections, the son is indeed relevant to the truth at hand, and doesn't thwart the ontological project at the heart of truthmaker theory. Ontology doesn't suffer. If one claims that "intuition" suffers, that it's counterintuitive to allow the cases of "permissive" truthmaking, then I respond by asserting that the goal of truthmaker theory is not to preserve intuition, whatever that might mean. The notion of truthmaking is a philosopher's tool, and it is not beholden to some set of purported pretheoretical judgments about individual cases. Some of those judgments, after all, I have tried to explain away as being unnecessary leftovers of the fading notion of correspondence.

I conclude this section with one final observation. My view best coheres with a fairly "deflationary" perspective of necessary truth. But even those who disagree with me on that point can adopt everything I say about contingent truthmaking. Perhaps, though, there are other metaphysical perspectives with which my account of truthmaking is fundamentally at odds. Consider Williamson's necessitism, the view that all existing objects exist necessarily. I have made no secret of my suspicion of this view. But do

[22] It's worth pointing out that this challenge parallels the one facing those giving possible worlds semantics for necessary truths (e.g., Lewis 1986). Thanks go to Keith Simmons for stressing this observation to me. It strikes me that being able to semantically distinguish necessary truths is a far more pressing theoretical need than being able to ontologically distinguish them.

I rule it out from the outset? Williamson has argued to that effect (1999, 2013: 391–403). Suppose *x* is a truthmaker for *y*, which is to say, at a minimum, that *x* necessitates the truth of *y*. But now suppose, per necessitism, that *x* necessarily exists. Then it follows that *y* is necessarily true. Any truth with a truthmaker, then, is a necessary truth. (And if maximalism is true, then all truths are necessary.) Williamson finds the "modal collapse" between necessary and contingent truth to be devastating (but not his own modal collapse between necessary and contingent existence), and rejects truthmaker theory on that basis. I address Williamson's argument elsewhere (Asay 2016b, and below in Section 5.1), but it's worthwhile at the moment to point out how Williamson would be better served by offering a different understanding of the truthmaking relation, not abandoning truthmaker theory altogether: for the latter, recall, is fundamentally a call to ontological honesty. Regardless of whether or not his ontology is filled with necessary beings, Williamson should not be comfortable adopting an ontology that is not properly aligned with what he takes to be true. An ontology without penguins is impermissible for anyone who believes that <Penguins exist> is true, regardless of the modal status of the penguins. What Williamson's argument shows is that necessitation is not the right tool for *him* to articulate the needed connection between truth and ontology. But I maintain that he still needs that connection, and however he goes about accounting for it constitutes his own perspective on truthmaking.

A similar line of thought applies to someone who adopts David Lewis's concrete modal realism (1986). Given that Jia Jia exists only in the actual world, there is no possible world in which Jia Jia exists, but <Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister of Australia in 2009> is false. That certainly sounds like Jia Jia necessitates, and therefore makes true, the proposition. Coupling modal realism with truthmaking as necessitation in this way does lead to genuinely trivial truthmaking. The fix for this problem is easy to recognize, of course (see Lewis 2001b: 604–605, and 2003: 28). Necessitation should be understood somewhat differently: what it is for *x* to necessitate *y* is that in every possible world in which either *x* or one of *x*'s counterparts exists, *y* is true. Jia Jia now no longer necessitates facts about Kevin Rudd, because there are worlds where her counterpart happily roams the Sichuan mountains and Rudd's counterpart never comes to power.

The moral I draw from thinking about the cases of Williamson and Lewis is that my account of the truthmaking relation is best suited for a metaphysics that doesn't start with necessitism or concrete modal realism.

This has been the sort of metaphysics presupposed by most every metaphysician working on truthmakers. That said, other competing views can still make sense of truthmaking; they just need to modify the theoretical apparatus somewhat. Perhaps it would be ideal to have an account of the truthmaking relation so completely neutral that it begged no metaphysical question whatsoever. I do not know whether such an account can be given, but I would welcome it should it appear. (I will not despair over its absence, though; my pragmatist sensibilities here are fundamentally interested in an account that serves the task at hand.) In the meantime, I am content with pointing out what presuppositions about metaphysics my account of the truthmaking relation requires. For those who adopt competing presuppositions, I hold out the hope that ideas and arguments parallel to those I offer can be spelled out in ways that are consistent with their own framework.[23]

3.3.2 Restall's Challenge

There are concerns for the basic necessitation account and its liberal application of the truthmaking relation that go beyond what some might find to be its counterintuitive consequences. Given certain principles, it can lead to global trivialization about truthmaking. The argument, originally due to Restall (1996), relies on a number of general principles about truthmaking:

(N) For any *x* and *y*, *x* is a truthmaker for *y* if and only if it is necessary that if *x* exists, *y* is true.
(D) Any truthmaker for a disjunction is a truthmaker for at least one of its disjuncts.

From the necessitation principle (N) we can derive that the Mariana Trench is a truthmaker for <Kangaroos hold some Olympic records or kangaroos hold no Olympic records>. Because it's false that kangaroos hold some Olympic records, one can now derive from (D) that the Mariana Trench is a truthmaker for <Kangaroos hold no Olympic records>. Using this style of reasoning, one can use (N) and (D) to show that any given object is a truthmaker for any given truth, which trivializes all truthmaking, not just truthmaking for necessities.

[23] Thanks go to Jack Yip for his very helpful discussion over these matters of neutrality and truthmaking.

Philosophers have responded to Restall's challenge – a kind of slingshot argument – in a number of ways.[24] Several place (D) on the chopping block (Read 2000, Heathcote 2003, Jago 2009, López de Sa 2009, Tałasiewicz et al. 2013). Many, of course, reject (N), as they accept that necessitation is at most a necessary condition of truthmaking. But the problem can still be generated via a different principle:

(E) For any *x*, *y*, and *z*, if *x* is a truthmaker for *y* and *y* entails *z*, then *x* is a truthmaker for *z*.

The Mariana Trench is a truthmaker for <The Mariana Trench exists>, and <The Mariana Trench exists> entails, on the standard understanding of entailment as necessary truth preservation, <Kangaroos hold some Olympic records or kangaroos hold no Olympic records>. The entailment principle (E) can now be used in conjunction with (D) to derive the same triviality result as before. As a result, some prefer a restriction on (E), defending it only for a reading of "entails" that doesn't have all truths trivially entailing all necessary truths (Restall 1996, Armstrong 2004). Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006b, 2009) defends (D) but rejects (E) on every reading of "entails," because he believes his "extraneous parts" cases are counterexamples to it, even given a "relevance" account of entailment: conjunctions always entail their conjuncts, even if they don't entail all necessary truths.[25]

Since (E) follows from (N), the natural maneuver for the simple necessitation account I uphold is to cast aspersions on (D). Unlike the entailment principle, this particular disjunction principle doesn't follow from (N). Another disjunction principle does:

(D*) Any truthmaker for some truth is a truthmaker for any disjunction that contains that truth as a disjunct.

(D*) is just a straightforward application of (E), and has been with truthmaker theory from the beginning. It's the sort of principle that speaks to the basic economical thinking behind truthmaker theory: there don't need to be *sui generis* "disjunctive facts" to make true disjunctions, because atomic facts can perform that role themselves.[26] (D) elicits much

[24] Davidson's (1969) famous slingshot argument was that if true statements correspond to facts, they all correspond to the same fact. For discussion of that slingshot argument in the context of truthmaking, see Rodriguez-Pereyra 1998 and 1999, Hochberg 2007: 213–220, Fumerton 2010: 93–95, and Jacquette 2015.

[25] See Jago (2009) for criticism of Rodriguez-Pereyra's view.

[26] The consensus behind (D*) is about as close to universal as anything gets in truthmaker theory. See Russell 1919b: 39, Smith 1982, Lewis 1992: 216, Simons 1992: 161, Restall 1996: 334,

less sympathy than (D*), but it does have its defenders. Restall calls it "quite plausible" (1996: 334); Rodriguez-Pereyra calls it "extremely plausible" (2006b: 965). Cameron says it "is a plausible sounding thesis" (2008b: 263).[27]

It's not. Instances of it certainly are. Socrates is a truthmaker for <Socrates exists>, and so <Socrates exists or Aristotle lectured to moon men> is true. Socrates is plausibly also a truthmaker for that disjunction. After all, committing to Socrates in your ontology gives you the appropriate ontological grounds for the true part of that disjunction. Nothing else needs to exist in order for the disjunction to be true. So we have a very plausible and straightforward case in which a truthmaker for a disjunction is also a truthmaker for one of the disjuncts. But there is no reason to think that the principle holds in all cases. Nor is the reason why any mystery: some disjunctions are ontologically vacuous, but have ontologically substantive disjuncts. That is to say, the ontological requirements for some disjunctions are less than the ontological requirements for the individual disjuncts. That being so, it's obvious why (D) is false. Instances of (D) hold only when the substance of the disjuncts is equal to or less than the substance in the disjunction.

The point can be made less figuratively. When a disjunction is contingent, its truth depends upon one of its disjuncts being true. It could come out false if both disjuncts are false. In such cases, the instances of (D) are plausible: the disjunction depends on the disjuncts, and so the ontological grounds for the disjunction depend on the ontological grounds for the disjuncts. But this reasoning doesn't carry over to trivial disjunctions. Instances of the law of excluded middle don't depend for their truth on the truth of one of their disjuncts. Necessary disjunctions would be true no matter what. They make exactly zero demand on our ontological accounting, but there is no reason to think that the disjuncts, therefore, enjoy a release from ontological accountability. However, that is precisely what (D) offers: it says that once you've done your accounting for a disjunction, you've also done the accounting for the true disjunct. That claim is plainly false when we attend to necessary disjunctions, which are precisely the kinds of examples that are exploited in Restall's argument. To put it bluntly, (D) is plausible only with respect to contingent disjunctions; the triviality argument, however, turns on instances of (D) that involve

Rodriguez-Pereyra 1999: 177 and 2006b: 960, Read 2000: 69, Heathcote 2003: 350, Jago 2009: 411, and Angere 2015.

[27] See also Smith 1982, Williamson 2007: 600, and Rodriguez-Pereyra 2009.

necessary disjunctions, and (D) is obviously false when viewed in the light of those instances.[28]

On my account, the Mariana Trench may be said to be a truthmaker for any instance of the law of excluded middle. But notice that this claim amounts to no more than the claim that the Mariana Trench necessitates these truths (which is not contested), and that those who commit to the Mariana Trench have done their ontological due diligence with respect to such necessary truths (also true). It doesn't follow from those observations that the Mariana Trench is also sufficient ontological grounds for claims about anything whatsoever, which is what (D) claims. (D) is easily recognized to be a false truthmaking principle, especially once we get clear about what truthmaking is. Consequently, Restall's triviality challenge can be met, even by those who adopt the bare necessitation account of truthmaking.

3.4 Trivial Truthmaking

I want to conclude this chapter by being clear about what I do and don't mean by talking about "triviality" in the context of truthmaking. In my view, all objects are truthmakers for all necessary truths. However, I reject Merricks's contention that such cases of truthmaking are therefore not genuine. They are genuine – the necessitation is genuine, after all – though of course the truthmaking in these instances is ontologically indiscriminate. I have no objection to continuing to use the language of triviality here. What I mean is this: any truth $<p>$ is trivially made true (or a "trivial truth") if and only if for all x, x is a truthmaker for $<p>$. Given my analysis of the truthmaking relation, all necessary truths are trivial in this sense. Other accounts of the truthmaking relation will accompany their own range of trivial truths. For some views, that range might be empty.

When it comes to ontological accounting, any truth that falls into the realm of the trivial is simply handled: as long as *something* is in one's ontology, the accounting is sound.[29] Trivial truths are not exactly given a

[28] One of the external reviewers helpfully demonstrated why (D) can't be correct even when restricted to contingent disjunctions. Suppose $<p>$ and $<q>$ are contingent truths, with T being a truthmaker for $<p>$. $<p>$ is logically equivalent to $<(p$ and $q)$ or $(p$ and not-$q)>$, and so T is a truthmaker for it as well. The second disjunct is false, so if (D) is true, then T is a truthmaker for $<p$ and $q>$ and so $<q>$ as well. This triviality result is obviously unacceptable, so (D) must be rejected, even for contingent disjunctions.

[29] What about the empty world? I don't have a stake in the debate over whether an empty world is possible. My project takes for granted that the empty world isn't actual, so it's not my concern. Those interested in settling the books of other possible ways the world might have been are free to do so.

free pass; they're more like young children accompanying a parent to an amusement park. The adult pays full admission, and children under three are free. Trivial truths, I stress again, *do* have truthmakers. Thus, they belong to a category distinct from the one to which truths with no truthmakers – truthmaker gaps – belong. Merricks, recall, collapses the distinction. This results in a double misunderstanding: it gets trivial truths wrong, and truthmaker gaps wrong. Getting clear on the nature and existence of truthmaker gaps is the goal of the next chapter.

Note that my focus here is on what it means to be a trivial *truth* in a truthmaking context. It's just a truth made true by everything. Later on, the occasion will arise to discuss trivial *truthmakers*. These entities, foreshadowed in Section 3.3.1 and discussed in more detail in Chapter 11, are entities that couldn't help but exist. If there are such things, they are the *weakest* entities around, in terms of truthmaking. So I shall understand a trivial *truthmaker* as any entity that makes true all necessary truths (as all entities do that), but nothing else. A trivial truthmaker, then, stands in the truthmaking relation only to trivial truths. As we shall see, trivial *truths* find themselves intimately related to the analysis of analyticity (Chapter 7); trivial *truthmakers* make their appearance in the philosophy of mathematics (Chapter 11).

CHAPTER 4

Truthmaker Maximalism and the Scope of Truthmaking

I turn now to the scope of truthmaking. Do all truths have truthmakers, or just a proper subset? I adopt the latter answer, and use the considerations from the earlier chapters to defend it. My primary goal in this chapter is to defend nonmaximalism, that is, to defend the existence of legitimate truthmaker gaps: truths without a truthmaker. It is not my present goal to offer a precise statement of which truths have, and which truths lack truthmakers. Doing so goes against my preferred methodological approach to truthmaking, according to which truths must be treated on a case by case basis. Only after such inspection should we adopt views about how far the need for truthmakers reaches. My main ambition, then, is to defend the tenability of truthmaker gaps in general; where exactly they are found is a topic that will surface frequently in the rest of the book, as truthmaker theorists have reasonable disagreements about it. For now, I embark on a general defense of nonmaximalism. A large part of the defense is concerned with meeting the objections that maximalists have offered against their opponents. As I argue, those objections frequently turn on presupposing an explanatory approach to truthmaking.

4.1 The Defense of Maximalism

Truthmaker maximalism is most closely associated with David Armstrong, its most outspoken proponent (1993: 435, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2010).[1] Interestingly, Armstrong long dragged his feet on full-blown maximalism. Here is his first – to my knowledge – articulation of something in the neighborhood of a "truthmaker principle":

[1] See also Simons 1992, Molnar 2000, Mulligan 2007, Cameron 2008a and 2008d, Veber 2008, Restall 2009, Jacquette 2010, Schaffer 2010, Fiocco 2013, and Rettler 2016.

> 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. (Armstrong 1969: 23; see also 1973: 11)

First, note the explicit restriction on truthmaking to contingent propositions. Second, note that his argument for the principle uses nothing more than the supervenience principle later defended by Bigelow (1988) and Lewis (1992, 2001b) as an *alternative* to maximalism, even when limited solely to contingent truths. Consider the contingently true <There are no Arctic red pandas>. If we imagine it false, we certainly imagine a difference in the world, namely, a far more adorable Arctic landscape. It doesn't follow from such imaginings that the negative existential has a truthmaker; at most it shows that had the proposition been false, something that doesn't in fact exist (namely, an Arctic red panda) would have existed. As late as 1989, Armstrong was still defending maximalism only with respect to contingent truths (1989b, 1989c: 88).

When Armstrong does finally adopt unrestricted maximalism, he does so in an open-minded spirit: "let us treat Maximalism as a hypothesis to be tested by this whole work" (2004: 7). Others are more cavalier. George Molnar writes that admitting truthmaker gaps of any sort "is the way of ontological frivolousness. It is a truly desperate resort" (2000: 85; cf. Armstrong 1997: 135). Ross Cameron claims that truthmaker theory is "just not the kind of theory that can apply only in a restricted domain" (2008a: 412, but see his claims to the contrary in 2005; cf. Contessa 2010: 343). Armstrong himself takes a jab at nonmaximalists, accusing them of "giving up on truthmakers as soon as the going gets hard" (2004: 70). For many, maximalism is the default perspective in truthmaker theory.[2] In fact, several writers identify "the truthmaker principle" or "truthmaker axiom" with maximalism.[3] Furthermore, some critics of truthmaker theory (Dodd 2002a, Merricks 2007, Tallant 2018) view maximalism as a *sine qua non* of truthmaker theory, such that the existence of any truthmaker gap whatsoever serves as an automatic refutation of the entire truthmaking

[2] But note that Armstrong claims that "most" truthmaker theorists are nonmaximalists (2006: 245). Cf. Fiocco 2013: 13.

[3] See, e.g., Simons 1992: 159, Williamson 1999: 253, Lewis 2001a: 277, 2001b: 604, and 2003: 29, Dodd 2002a: 69 and 2002b, Beebee and Dodd 2005: 1, Daly 2005: 85, Milne 2005: 221, Kukso 2006: 21, Kierland and Monton 2007: 489, Cameron 2008a: 410, David 2009: 137, Kitamura 2014: 200, MacBride 2014: 371, and Griffith 2015b. Note that sometimes the principle is stated with modal force: necessarily, all truths have truthmakers. Sorensen (2001: 171) identifies "the truthmaker principle" with maximalism about contingent truths only.

enterprise. Dodd even goes so far as to censure nonmaximalists like Bigelow with lacking self-respect (2007: 395).

The initial, and still most prominent defenders of nonmaximalist approaches to truthmaking need not take Dodd's castigation seriously. In his approach to truthmaking, John Bigelow (1988) rejects maximalism in favor of a supervenience principle: had something that is in fact true been false, then the world's ontology must have been different. The supervenience here is global: it is the entire collection of truths that supervene on the totality of reality. This principle relieves Bigelow from finding truthmakers for negative existentials. Had <There are no unicorns> been false, then there must have been something (namely, a unicorn) that does not in fact exist. I call this the "strong" supervenience principle, so as to contrast it with a "weak" supervenience principle defended by David Lewis (2001b). Lewis suggests that an even better principle is that if something true hadn't been true, then *either* the world's ontology must have been different, *or* the pattern of properties and relations that the existing things instantiate must have been different. This principle relieves Lewis from offering truthmakers for contingent predications. Had Socrates not been a philosopher, then there needn't have been a difference in ontology; Socrates could have just had a different set of properties. By defending these principles instead of maximalism, Bigelow and Lewis happily concede that there are truthmaker gaps. What they deny is the existence of "supervenience gaps," truths that fail to supervene in the appropriate way on reality. These competing principles, and their implications for the debate over realism and nominalism, will return to my focus in Chapter 9. For now, it's sufficient to appreciate that the nonmaximalist approach favored by Bigelow and Lewis accords nicely with the ontology-first perspective on truthmaking that I've defended. They, too, aim to coordinate their views on truth and ontology.

In spite of these alternatives, maximalism looms large in the truthmaking literature. Despite all the rhetoric in favor of its centrality, there is little actual argument given for it (a point often noticed: Dodd 2002a: 70, Beebee and Dodd 2005: 4, Merricks 2007: 2, Fiocco 2013: 13, Jago 2018: 53–54). Armstrong, for one, never gives much of an argument for maximalism. As cited above, he notes that he takes contingent maximalism to be "obvious" (1969: 23). Later, after adopting truthmakers for necessary truths as well, he admits that he does "not have any direct argument" for maximalism; instead, he writes: "My hope is that philosophers of realist inclinations will be immediately attracted to the idea that a truth, any

truth, should depend for its truth for [*sic*] something 'outside' it, in virtue of which it is true" (2004: 7; cf. 1989c: 89).

Others have suggested that there is something intuitive about maximalism (McGrath 2003: 666, Lowe 2007: 237, Fiocco 2013: 2, and Zamani 2017: 472). Whether that would even count as a reason in favor of the view is contentious (see, e.g., Deutsch 2015). However, it seems quite implausible to me that a theoretically loaded and metaphysically demanding thesis like truthmaker maximalism should figure into anyone's pretheoretical beliefs about the world. Peter Simons captures the right attitude about what sort of thesis maximalism is:

> It is important to realize that Maximalism is not mandated by accepting truthmaking as a realist account of truth. It results from extending the plausible and attractive idea that some basic contingent truths are in need of something to make them true to the whole gamut of truths. . . . Maximalism is a theoretical position extrapolating from a fundamental insight, it is not itself a fundamental insight. (2005: 254–255; cf. Smith and Simon 2007: 82)

The fundamental insight is the idea that truth in general depends on ontology, and some truths in particular very specifically depend on certain parts of ontology. But that insight alone provides no argument for maximalism, which demands a truthmaker for every last truth, however trivial and ontologically indifferent.[4]

Though a bit rare, there are arguments and considerations to be found that favor maximalism.[5] One, in effect, takes the form of a slippery slope argument, and is articulated by Ross Cameron. Cameron is considering a kind of nonmaximalism that admits that "negative" truths (such as <There are no Arctic red pandas>) lack truthmakers, in spite of not being necessitated by the "positive" truths that do have truthmakers:

> Truthmaker theory is a theory about what it is for a proposition to be true; it's just not the kind of theory that can apply only in a restricted domain. What possible reason could one have for thinking of some propositions that they need to be grounded in what there is that doesn't apply to all propositions? Why should it be okay for negative truths to go ungrounded

[4] Simons later refers to maximalism as "a conjectural and speculative piece of semantico-metaphysics overgeneralizing from a few plausible cases" (2007a: 333).

[5] Jago reports that E. J. Lowe suggested to him an inductive argument for maximalism: many truths clearly do have truthmakers, so it's reasonable to infer that all do (2018: 87–88). I agree with Jago's negative assessment of this argument: seeing as the potential counterexamples are already well known, there is suspicion that the truths with truthmakers are not representative of the class of truths as a whole.

> and not okay for positive truths to go ungrounded? And if negative truths don't have truthmakers then make no mistake: they are ungrounded. . . . So either truthmaker maximalism is true or we should abandon truthmaker theory altogether. (Cameron 2008a: 412)

Cameron's argument and rhetorical questions betray a number of presuppositions. First, he believes that no rationale can be given for why some truths might require truthmakers but others might not – this is the source of the slippery slope. If it's "okay" for one truth to be a truthmaker gap, then it's okay for any truth to be a truthmaker gap (cf. Beebee and Dodd 2005: 3–4, Merricks 2007: 24–25 and 40, Mumford 2007a: 49, and Williamson 2013: 403). But there is such a rationale. Some truths are about what there is, and some truths are about what there isn't. And attending to what truths are about is the first step in giving an account of their grounds (if they have any). Hence, there is at least one reason why someone might think a truth about what there *isn't* is not grounded in what there *is*. This observation doesn't seal the deal for nonmaximalism, but it does provide a reason to consider the nonmaximalist position.[6]

For it to succeed, Cameron's argument must rely on a number of strong connections between the ideas of truth, truthmaking, and grounding. To say that a truth has no truthmaker is to say, at a minimum, that nothing in one's ontology guarantees its truth. It is not to say that the truth is metaphysically inexplicable. It is not to say that the truth is brute. It's not even to say that the truth lacks any ontological commitments. But if, per Cameron's view, having a truthmaker amounts to being grounded, and being grounded amounts to being properly explained, then it makes sense that one might reject nonmaximalism. Nonmaximalism then appears to be the view that negative existentials (or any other truthmaker gap) are brute, inexplicable truths: they admit of no explanation. Consider how a "nonmaximalist" version of the correspondence theory of truth would appear. Truth *is* correspondence with fact – such correspondence is how we explain the presence of truth – but some truths don't correspond with facts. The position is hardly intelligible: truth is defined in terms of correspondence, except when it isn't. No one should adopt that kind of nonmaximalism.

What Cameron's argument assumes – and as he explicitly states – is that giving a theory of truthmaking is giving a theory of the nature of truth. This is the explanation-first approach to truthmaking at work. Without it,

[6] Cf. Schipper 2018.

Cameron's argument fails. On the ontology-first approach, to deny a truth a truthmaker is not to banish it to the mysteries of brute metaphysics, or to count it among the most fundamental things in the universe, for which there cannot be any explanation. It is simply to say that it carries no positive ontological burden of requiring a necessitator: in committing to its truth, one needn't expand one's ontology to find such a thing.

Explanation-first truthmaking also comes to the surface in Oreste Fiocco's defense of maximalism. Fiocco's argument is that the rejection of maximalism leads to either incoherence or contradiction. If there are truthmaker gaps, then their truth is indifferent to the rest of reality. But a truthmaker gap's negation might have a truthmaker. So *p* might be a truthmaker gap, even though the world provides a truthmaker for not-*p*, generating a contradiction. Here is what I take to be Fiocco's clearest statement of the argument:

> A truth, whether it is a proposition, sentence, belief, etc. is a representation. If there is no feature of the world in virtue of which that representation is true (and no interesting necessary feature), then there are no clearly related conditions that must be met in order for the representation to be true. Without such truth-conditions, there is no feature of the world relevant to its truth. Thus, there appears to be no connection between that representation and the world. There is nothing the representation represents. A representation, however, cannot fail to represent or be about anything. A representation that fails to be about anything does not present – it is not descriptive in any way – and, hence, could not be true in virtue of nothing, for it could not be true at all. A "representation" that presents nothing does not even admit of being true. So the idea that there can be a true representation that is so yet in virtue of nothing particular in the world contravenes the very idea of representation. The idea is incoherent and, thus, insofar as it follows from a denial of the claim that every truth has a truthmaker, an absolute principle of truthmaking [i.e., maximalism] should be accepted. (2013: 15)

Fiocco's argument begs the question. His premise amounts to the claim that if there is no truthmaker for a true claim, then it has no truth-conditions. Conversely, if there are truth-conditions for a true claim, then it has a truthmaker. *That* is a statement that presupposes maximalism if anything does.

Furthermore, Fiocco's argument relies on the claim that "If *p* is true and yet has no truthmaker, there is no reason to think that its contradictory, not-*p*, also lacks one" (2013: 14). Quite to the contrary, we have logically conclusive reason to think that not-*p* lacks a truthmaker if *p* is a truthmaker gap. If *p* is a truthmaker gap and hence true, not-*p* is false, and

hence lacks a truthmaker. Fiocco claims that "the case in which both *p* and not-*p* lack truthmakers *though* p *is true* is so perplexing as to be hardly intelligible" (2013: 14). What is perplexing is why anyone would see any difficulty here. Suppose <There are no Arctic red pandas> is a truthmaker gap. Then its negation <There are Arctic red pandas> lacks a truthmaker because it's false. This situation is perplexing only if one is antecedently perplexed by the very idea of a truthmaker gap.

One way of understanding why Fiocco's argument fails is how it requires truthmaker gaps, *qua* truthmaker gaps, to be "supervenience gaps" as well.[7] A truth that fails to be necessitated by but still supervenes on what exists is not a truth that is ontologically indifferent. To say that a truth has no truthmaker is not to say that its truth doesn't supervene on what is, or that it is indifferent to reality. That point has been made very clearly by Bigelow and Lewis.

Let's turn now to some other arguments in support of maximalism. Michael Veber argues that maximalism is necessary for knowledge to be possible. With respect to negative truths, he writes: "Unless there is something in the world serving as their truthmakers, it is difficult or even impossible to see how this could be. If there is nothing in the world that makes it true that Not-P, in virtue of what could I possibly know it?" (2008: 80). Sorensen (2001) relies on a similar idea when he argues that because the truth-teller – i.e., "This sentence is true" – is a truthmaker (or falsemaker) gap, its truth-value, though determinate, is unknowable. Earlier, I observed how Gettier argues that knowledge is blocked when we're not appropriately related to a truth's truthmaker. So perhaps to know a truth is just to have the right kind of connection to its truthmaker. If so, maximalism follows only if all truths are knowable (which Sorensen denies); still, it would require truthmakers for all truths that are knowable, including ordinary negative truths.

To say, however, that knowledge requires the right kind of connection to the parts of the world relevant to some particular truth is not to say that knowledge requires the right kind of connection to a truthmaker. Veber's idea is tenable only if all truthmaker gaps are also supervenience gaps. Like Fiocco, Veber collapses the distinction between truths that fail to be necessitated by the world's ontology and truths that fail to supervene on the world's ontology. There are no vampires in my living room. That's true, and I know it's true because of all the perceptual evidence I have

[7] Put another way, Fiocco collapses the distinction between what Baron, Miller, and Norton (2014) call "strong" and "weak" nonmaximalism. I return to this sort of distinction in Section 4.3.

while sitting in my living room. Again, to lack a truthmaker is not to be mired in metaphysical mystery; it's just to lack a necessitator. It doesn't mean that a truth is completely isolated from reality. To know that there are no vampires in my living room, I do need to be epistemically connected in the right way to my living room and its contents. And indeed, <There are no vampires in my living room> does make an ontological demand on my living room: it demands that vampires be excluded from the room's ontology. So my knowledge of this truth does depend on my having the right sort of sensitivity to the truth's ontological implications. But it doesn't follow that my knowledge requires acquaintance with a truthmaker. The nonmaximalist, therefore, has no trouble countenancing the basic idea that Veber and Gettier notice. Once we distinguish between truthmaker gaps and supervenience gaps, we can appreciate how this plausible epistemological idea needs to be articulated more subtly.[8]

There is one final pro-maximalism consideration I would like to address. Nonmaximalists would seem to be committed to a *dualist* or even *disjunctive* view of truth.[9] Truths come in two shapes: those that are truth-made, and those that are not. Playing devil's advocate, Smith and Simon observe that truthmaker maximalism "is elegant, not least, because its rejection seems to force a certain dualism in characterizing truths: on the one hand are those true in virtue of truthmakers, on the other hand are all the rest" (2007: 82). Nonmaximalists would seem to adopt the slogan of alethic pluralists (e.g., Lynch 2009), namely, that "there is more than one way of being true." I shall set aside the question whether a commitment to alethic pluralism is objectionable in and of itself.[10] My present contention is that dualism or pluralism about truth is no consequence of nonmaximalism.

Nonmaximalists about truthmaking are not committed to a nonunified theory of truth because theories of truthmaking are not theories of truth. This fact is seen most clearly once we distinguish ontology-first and explanation-first truthmaking. Truthmaker theory, considered as a live and growing research project, is not inherently maximalist. The enterprise itself does not depend on maximalism being true. But if truthmaker theory were inherently a theory of truth, then truthmaker theory, by its very nature, would have to be maximalist. A nonmaximalist "truthmaker theory of truth" is a nonstarter. It would maintain that to be true is to be made

[8] Timothy Perrine (2015: 190–191) also challenges the epistemological argument.

[9] See Armstrong 2005: 272, 2006: 245, 2007: 99, and 2010: 63, Mumford 2007b: 316, Cameron 2008b: 263, and 2008d: 108, Barker and Jago 2012: 136, Griffith 2015b: 1170, Jago 2018: 89, and Saenz (in press).

[10] I critique alethic pluralism in Asay 2018a.

true, though some truths are not made true. Putting truthmaker theory to work in the theory of truth is strictly optional, and an option available only to maximalists.[11] Therefore, nonmaximalists are not committed to a non-unified theory of truth; their nonmaximalism reveals that they are not thereby committed to any theory of truth whatsoever (save for their rejection of a truthmaking-based one).

Mark Jago still sees some objections for nonmaximalists here. First, he suggests that for those truths that do have truthmakers, "There's a strong case to be made that, for those truths, their truth consists in their having a truthmaker. That is essential to their being true" (2018: 89). But truthmaker gaps can't have their truth consist in having a truthmaker, so nonmaximalists are committed to dualism about truth. This argument begs the question, as it starts from the claim that sometimes the property of truth consists in having a truthmaker, which is precisely the thesis under dispute. Second, Jago claims that it would be desirable to define truth in terms of truthmaking, and the nonmaximalist's inability to do so is a cost (2012b: 904, 2013: 461). Given my own views about truth (e.g., Asay 2013b), the need for a substantive theory of truth based on truthmaking is unnecessary and undesirable. Ontology-first truthmaking preserves what is correct about the correspondence theory of truth, and respecting truth's important place in our conceptual scheme does not require the sorts of metaphysical posits or substantive definitions required by other theories. To think that nonmaximalists are committed to dualism about truth presupposes that truthmaking is all about analyzing truth, and that is the failed explanatory paradigm rearing its head yet again.

4.2 The Defense of Nonmaximalism

The reasons in favor of maximalism are wanting. But the reasoning behind some of the maximalist arguments do reveal an important task for nonmaximalists: how can a truth be both a truthmaker gap and at the same time "ontologically respectable"? In this section, I first make the standard argument that favors nonmaximalism, and then raise some familiar ontological considerations that reveal it to be superior. Then I articulate what I take to be the best way of understanding truthmaker gaps, so that they need not set off the red flags that so often worry maximalists. Nonmaximalism does not embrace a "frivolous" attitude toward ontology.

[11] It's not a tenable option, however, as I argue in Section 6.2.

Truthmakers offer ontological accountability. To offer a truthmaker for a truth is to cover one's bases in ontology, so as to ensure that one's overall ontology is an appropriate fit for one's overall worldview. It does not follow from this idea alone that all truths accompany necessitating truthmakers. It could be that the right ontological response to a particular truth is *not* to add something to one's ontology, or even subtract one. Truth does depend on being, but that is not to say that each individual truth depends on some particular piece of being. This latter, stronger claim is central to the explanatory paradigm of truthmaking, which emphasizes a "localized" focus on truthmaking: what is the particular piece of being that matches up with this particular truth? Ontology-first truthmaking is satisfied by the "global" approach that looks for overall harmony between our alethic and ontological commitments (i.e., between what we take to be true and what we take to exist).

The best case for nonmaximalism is the oldest. Just look. There is a large collection of truths that straightforwardly call for no truthmaker. The maximalist demand that they must nevertheless have them is driven by highly theoretical and abstract principles about truth and truthmaking in general. The belief that there is a need for these truths to have truthmakers is not motivated by inspection of the actual truths in question.[12] I have already called a number of those theoretical principles into question. They ought to lose their force in the face of compelling counterexamples.[13]

Those compelling counterexamples are, of course, negative existentials, truths about what doesn't exist. The case for nonmaximalism has long been recognized by maximalists and nonmaximalists alike, and has been put forward by both defenders and critics of truthmaking.[14] Michael Pendlebury observes that if a "proposition explicitly denies the existence

[12] Cf. Dodd: "The demand for truthmakers for such propositions seems theoretically driven rather than intuitive" (2007: 385; see also his 2000: 81 and Kitamura 2016: 8).

[13] In spite of all our differences, there is an important methodological point of reconciliation here between myself and Rodriguez-Pereyra. Abstracted from individual instances, the conjunction principle that Rodriguez-Pereyra rejects – that any truthmaker for a conjunction is a truthmaker for the conjuncts – might sound just fine. But in the face of potential counterexamples, it loses its force. Though I disagree with Rodriguez-Pereyra on this particular case, I share his method of putting individual cases first, and not just relying on principles that might sound perfectly acceptable in the abstract. Reflective equilibrium between cases and principles (Goodman 1983: 64) is just as called for in truthmaking as it is anywhere else in philosophy.

[14] Recall that some critics of truthmaking take the existence of any truthmaker gap whatsoever to be the downfall of truthmaking, and so use negative existentials against truthmaker theory itself (Dodd 2002a and 2007, Merricks 2007). (Dodd, ironically and/or inconsistently, thinks that truthmaker theorists must regard truthmaking as fully general, but also as not applying to some truths, namely, analyticities [2007: 394]. Stenwall makes a similar claim [2017: 2975].) This section is an answer to their lack of belief in tenable, principled nonmaximalist truthmaking.

of something and does not, on any plausible understanding, imply, presuppose, or otherwise hinge on ontological commitments," requiring it to have a necessitating truthmaker and maintaining that "it is true because of existing entities" is "bizarre" (2010: 142). Maximalist stalwart George Molnar admits that negative existentials "are *prima facie* counter-examples" to maximalism (2000: 75). David Lewis concurs: "It seems, offhand, that they are true not because things of some kind *do* exist, but rather because counterexamples *don't* exist" (1992: 216).[15] The widely acknowledged argument is that negative existentials are first and foremost concerned with articulating what doesn't exist in the world. Proper ontological accounting, therefore, demands that one make sure that the relevant entities are *absent* from one's ontology; it makes no obvious demand that other things be present. To be an "atheist" about unicorns, say, is not to be a "theist" about "unicorn absences." One should admit unicorn absences only if <There are unicorn absences> is true, not because <There are no unicorns> is.[16] This argument is entirely sound, and demonstrates the truth of nonmaximalism. To combat it, maximalists must bring in more theoretical machinery to show that there is something intrinsically problematic about a truth without a truthmaker, but I have challenged such maneuvers already.[17]

The basic argument for nonmaximalism is given, in effect, by the truths themselves. Another argument – though no less controversial – comes from Peter Milne (2005, 2013).[18] Milne contemplates the following sentence, and argues that it is provably true, but has no truthmaker:

(M) (M) has no truthmaker.

Suppose (M) is false. Then (M) does have a truthmaker, and so is true, contradicting the original supposition. So, by *reductio*, (M) is true. If so, (M) has no truthmaker, since (M) is true if and only if (M) has no truthmaker. (M) is a truthmaker gap.

[15] See also Mellor 2003: 213–214, and 2009, J. R. Cameron 2005: 288, R. P. Cameron 2005, Melia 2005: 69, Smith and Simon 2007: 94, Jago 2012b: 905, and Saenz 2014: 92.

[16] One radical response to the challenge is to deny that there are any negative truths (Mumford 2007a and 2007b). See Simons 2007a for criticism.

[17] Others who accept that negative existentials are counterexamples to maximalism include Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Bigelow 1988, Linsky 1994, Smith 1999, Lewis 2001b, Mumford 2005, Simons 2005 and 2007a, and Parsons 2006. See Embry (2016) for a historical look at nonmaximalism in response to the problem of negative truths. Lovett (2014) offers arguments for nonmaximalism that don't focus on negative truths, as does Cameron 2010a.

[18] Though Milne's articles have received significant response, he appears to have been scooped by Khlentzos (2000), who discusses the same kind of cases in detail, and draws the same conclusion.

Whether Milne's argument is dialectically useful against maximalism is debatable. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006a) argues that, from the perspective of maximalism, (M) is assimilable to the liar sentence (L) – "(L) is not true" – since the maximalist regards "true" and "has a truthmaker" as necessarily co-extensive.[19] The liar paradox is a problem for everyone, and whatever solution is available will apply to Milne's example as well. Heathcote, for example, denies that (M) expresses any proposition (2006: 160). Milne contends, to the contrary, that the example is better likened to a Gödel sentence, and that the role truth plays in the argument is dispensable. López de Sa and Zardini (2006 and 2007) argue that there must be some problem with the reasoning behind Milne's argument, as parallel arguments lead to absurd results. They do not, however, identify what this problematic reasoning is, though they suspect it has to do with factive predicates like "has a truthmaker" that entail the truth of that of which they are predicated.

Rodriguez-Pereyra, it seems to me, offers the maximalist the best response available: (M) is paradoxical, and thus poses no special problem for truthmaker theory that isn't already posed by the liar paradox.[20] The problem for maximalists, as I see it, is not that Milne has refuted them, but that nonmaximalists have a more principled stance with respect to (M). Is there independent reason to think that (M) is paradoxical, once we stop assuming the truth of maximalism? On the face of it, no. (M) is self-referential, but so are plenty of sentences ("This sentence is six words long"). One might claim that (M) is *viciously* self-referential, but that is to beg the question at hand. Furthermore, there are independently motivated cases of truthmaker gaps (such as negative existentials), so (M) is in good company – Milne even notes that (M) itself appears to be a negative existential (2005: 223). Milne's analogy with Gödel sentences is useful here. Rejecting (M) as paradoxical because of a background commitment to maximalism is like rejecting Gödel sentences because of a background commitment to the completeness of arithmetic. The nonmaximalist can accept (M) and the straightforward reasoning behind it; there is no need for ad hoc interpretation of what it does or doesn't say, or how we can or cannot reason with it. (M) is innocuous to nonmaximalists, with no revisionary implications. Regardless of whether or not (M) "refutes"

[19] See also Barrio and Rodriguez-Pereyra 2015.

[20] Gołosz (2015) counters the criticisms of López de Sa and Zardini and Rodriguez-Pereyra, and Zardini (2017) responds in turn. See also Brendel (in press).

maximalism, nonmaximalists have the more appealing and principled stance with respect to it.[21]

A third argument for nonmaximalism is also well known. The ontological costs of maximalism are severe. Hence, a truthmaking view that remains true to the spirit of truthmaking but incurs fewer costs is to be preferred. Mark Jago usefully divides the maximalist menu of options into "parsimonious" and "nonparsimonious" accounts (2013, 2018). The former attempt to find necessitating truthmakers for negative existentials without positing new and contentious ontological entities. Typically, the entire world is put to work as the truthmaker for negative existentials. If the entire world is the way it is as a matter of its essence, then it serves as a necessitating truthmaker for all truths, including truths about what doesn't exist.[22] Nonparsimonious accounts, on the other hand, acknowledge that ontological additions are in order if maximalism is to be accepted. The truthmakers suggested are absences (Martin 1996, Kukso 2006), totality states of affairs (Armstrong 1997, 2000, 2004),[23] and negative facts.[24] Waechter (2017) suggests positing a brute property of falsity, and attaching it to atomic propositions in order to generate truthmakers for negative claims. Some aporetic truthmaker theorists insist that there must be truthmakers for negative existentials, though they do not know what they are (Molnar 2000: 85). 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).

The debate over negative truths, and whether they require ontological grounds at all, seems to be the one core truthmaking issue that remained alive between the early logical atomism explored by Russell (1918, 1919b, 1919c, 1919d, and 1924) and Wittgenstein (1922) and contemporary

[21] Jago (2018: 311) argues that (M) expresses no proposition, but denies that it follows that (M) is true (though presumably he agrees that (M) has no truthmaker, since it doesn't even express a proposition). I find it perplexing how I can manage to speak truthfully by saying what (M) seems to say, though (M) doesn't say anything.

[22] For variations of this approach, see Lewis and Rosen 2003, Bricker 2006, Cheyne and Pigden 2006, Cameron 2008a, Veber 2008, Schaffer 2010 (which rejects necessitation), and Kitamura 2016. Other "parsimonious" accounts include Demos 1917, van Fraassen 1969, Pendlebury 1986 and 2010, Hochberg 1994, Heil 2000, McGrath 2003, Björnsson 2007, and Restall 2009.

[23] Armstrong's totality state of affairs has come in for lots of criticism (e.g., Cox 1997, Melia 2005, Keller 2007: 117–129, and Jago 2018: 146–149). See Tallant 2010a for a partial defense.

[24] E.g., Russell 1919b, Beall 2000, Priest, 2000, Scheffler and Shramko 2000, Jacquette 2010, Jago 2011, 2012b, 2013, and 2018, Barker and Jago 2012, Kühl 2014, and Paoletti 2014 and 2017. Tallant (2018: chapters 3 and 4) offers a sustained critique of such views.

truthmaking as it resurfaced in Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984) and Armstrong.[25] Despite endorsing the existence of *sui generis* negative facts, Russell acknowledged his ambivalence in doing so: "There is implanted in the human breast an almost un-quenchable desire to find some way of avoiding the admission that negative facts are as ultimate as those that are positive" (1919a: 4). Many theorists continue to maintain that this desire is correct, and I concur.[26] My goal in this section is not to make the case against the various parsimonious and nonparsimonious responses to maximalism; that work is abundant and ongoing.[27] Rather, my intent is to point out how the debate here is an intramaximalist one. *Given* that negative existentials need truthmakers, what are they? The host of ontological and theoretical costs that ensue are all avoided by the nonmaximalist, who denies the starting presumption. That in and of itself is an argument for nonmaximalism: it avoids the need for contentious ontological posits and revisionist ways of thinking about the world.

Ontological parsimony is, of course, not the only kind. Perhaps nonmaximalists' gains in ontological parsimony are offset by greater theoretical complexity incurred elsewhere. For instance, we earlier encountered the charge that nonmaximalists must adopt a more complicated, or even disjunctive theory of truth. That objection has already been met, but perhaps there are similar claims that might be made against the nonmaximalist's claim to overall parsimony. My claim is that nonmaximalists enjoy a prima facie claim to greater parsimony than their opponents, though of course this claim could be challenged.[28]

4.3 Two Kinds of Truthmaker Gaps

So far, I have defended nonmaximalism by undermining the positive case for maximalism, and offering arguments directly in its favor. In both cases, the distinction between explanation-first and ontology-first truthmaking was crucial. Maximalism makes most sense when the project of truthmaking is conceived as one of explaining the nature of truth itself. As a result, nonmaximalism seems to be a threat to the enterprise. Ontology-first

[25] See, e.g., Ushenko 1931, Taylor 1952, Lee 1953, Rosenberg 1972, and Oaklander and Miracchi 1980

[26] See, e.g., Demos 1917, Ushenko 1931, Lee 1953, Oaklander and Miracchi 1980, Pendlebury 1986, Hochberg 1992 and 1994, Simons 1992: 162, Molnar 2000, and Restall 2009.

[27] See, e.g., Tallant 2010c, Griffith 2013, Jago 2013 and 2018: chapter 5, and Saenz 2014, as well as almost any article that defends a positive position on the topic.

[28] Thanks go to one of the external reviewers for pressing me on this point.

truthmaking opens the door to subtler and more inclusive thinking about the relationship between truth and ontology. It demands proper ontological accounting, but does not in and of itself demand a truthmaker in every case.

Why is the nonmaximalist position so roundly criticized, by both proponents and critics of truthmaker theory? My suspicion is that two conflations are routinely made. The first we have met already – that between ontology-first and explanation-first truthmaking. The second is a conflation between two very different kinds of truthmaker gaps: those that fail to supervene on what is, and those that do not. That is to say, a truthmaker gap could also be a supervenience gap, but need not be. This distinction arose earlier when I identified the alternatives to maximalism offered by Bigelow and Lewis. The difference is best brought out by some examples. I have already defended ordinary negative existentials as truthmaker gaps. For example, <There are no Arctic red pandas> is true, but there is nothing in reality that necessitates its truth. Yet such a truth still supervenes on the world's ontology. Had it been false, the true ontological inventory would have been different. Now consider the truthmaker gap posited by Sorensen (2001): the truth-teller sentence (or its negation). On Sorensen's *epistemicist* view, the truth-teller ("This sentence is true") is either determinately true or determinately false. However, if true, nothing makes it true. This lack of truthmaker then explains why the sentence's truth-value is unknowable. Unlike the Liar sentence ("This sentence is false"), the truth-teller is consistent. If it's true, then it's true. If it's false, then it's false. Sorensen maintains that the sentence is one way or the other, but we cannot know which. The best explanation for this unavoidable ignorance is the lack of a truthmaker in either case. Nothing makes the truth-teller true, and nothing makes it false. It is nevertheless one way or the other.[29]

Sorensen acknowledges the dramatic consequences of his view, but in so doing makes the very conflation I aim to identify: "A violation of the truthmaker principle [i.e., maximalism about contingent truths] is serious business. In addition to grating against metaphysical principles, the violations are epistemologically grave. ... If there is no truthmaker for the proposition, how can the knower discriminate between the proposition being true and its being false?" (Sorensen 2001: 171). I answered Sorensen's rhetorical question when responding to Veber's maximalist argument

[29] See López de Sa and Zardini 2007, Armour-Garb and Woodbridge 2010, Cook 2011, Greenough 2011, and Jago 2012a for criticism of Sorensen's view.

earlier. How I know the difference between <There are no red pandas in my living room> being true and being false is by looking around my living room. How I know that (M) is true is by some simple deductive reasoning. There is nothing epistemically problematic in general about a truth without a truthmaker. Yet Sorensen's concern is perfectly appropriate for his own case: if true, the truth-teller would appear to depend for its truth upon nothing whatsoever in the world. Its truth is not an empirical matter, though Sorensen concedes that it is a contingent one. Neither empirical nor logical reasoning lends a hand in determining the truth-teller's truth-value. The world could be entirely the way it is, and yet the truth-value of the truth-teller could have been different, in Sorensen's view.

Sorensen's candidate truthmaker gap is ontologically indiscriminate. The truth-value of the truth-teller is completely indifferent toward what is going on in the world. Its truth does not supervene on the way of the world. Something very different is true about <There are no red pandas in my living room>. This truth is not ontologically indifferent in the least. A world with red pandas in my living room is ontologically different from (and better than) the actual world. Someone who believes that there are no red pandas in my living room incurs certain ontological responsibilities: when it comes to the person's ontological inventory with respect to my living room, red pandas had better not be found within it. The ontological demand in this case is to keep something out of one's ontology, rather than to put something in. But it is a demand nonetheless. The truth-teller, by contrast, makes no such demands, in Sorensen's view. To accept it as true might be epistemically irresponsible, but it comes with no ontological baggage. The decision to take it on or not can be taken with complete indifference toward one's ontological views.

There is a difference, therefore, between truthmaker gaps that are ontologically indifferent, and those that are not. (This distinction corresponds to the strong/weak nonmaximalism distinction drawn by Baron, Miller, and Norton [2014].) The truthmaker gaps that I have defended are of the latter variety. These are truths whose truth makes a difference for one's ontology. They make negative demands upon it, and in so doing do not shirk the task of ontological accountability. Ontologically indifferent truthmaker gaps (or "supervenience gaps") are another matter entirely, and I have not defended them. My present point is that conflating these two kinds of truthmaker gaps plays into the hands of maximalists. If one thought that to be a truthmaker gap was to be ontologically indifferent, then certain criticisms of nonmaximalism make much more sense. Recall Molnar's and Armstrong's suggestion that truthmaker gaps come at the

expense of "ontological frivolity." Recall Veber and Sorensen's suggestion that truthmaker gaps are unknowable. Consider Edwards's charge that there are no explanations available for why truthmaker gaps are true (2018: 159). Supervenience gaps are the proper targets of these criticisms. If some truth is contingently true, but its truth is nowhere reflected in reality, then indeed we would not have any epistemic access to it. As a contingent truth, it would seem to depend on the world for its truth. But as a supervenience gap, it doesn't depend on the world for its truth. Such cases are indeed puzzling, and we should certainly be cautious before admitting the existence of any such truths. What we should not do is assume that innocuous truthmaker gaps about what doesn't exist are in the same ontological and epistemological boat.

4.4 A Dilemma for Nonmaximalism

I conclude my defense of nonmaximalism by considering a dilemma posed against it by Mark Jago (2012b, chapter 3 of 2018). Jago argues that there are positive truths that entail negative truths, and that this poses a problem for nonmaximalists who try to saddle maximalists with a problematic ontology. If maximalists require a problematic ontology (such as one with negative facts), so too do nonmaximalists when it comes to accounting for positive truths that entail negative truths. If nonmaximalists account for such truths without problematic ontology, so too can maximalists. Either way, the nonmaximalist has no ontological advantage over the maximalists.[30]

Before responding to Jago's dilemma, one preliminary remark is in order. Jago defines nonmaximalism as follows: "By non-maximalist theory, I mean a theory which accounts for the truth or falsity of each proposition in terms of the existence or non-existence of truthmakers, either for that proposition or for other propositions, without requiring each true proposition to have a truthmaker" (2012b: 908). Jago's target is not my nonmaximalism. It's clear that Jago takes both maximalists and nonmaximalists to be offering theories of *truth*: truth is in every case to be analyzed in terms of the presence or absence of a truthmaker. However, in saying that <There are no Arctic red pandas> is a truthmaker gap, I am not saying that it is true in virtue of the absence of any truthmaker for <There are Arctic red pandas>. That might be an

[30] Baron (2015a) utilizes the same line of reasoning to challenge certain approaches to presentism. See Section 10.2.2.

innocuous thing to say (if one doesn't import lots of assumptions into "in virtue of"), but it is an optional position to hold.[31] It is incumbent upon the ontology-first truthmaker theorist to consider the ontological implications of <There are no Arctic red pandas>; offering an explanation of what it is for such a truth-bearer to be true is another matter.

That said, Jago's argument raises interesting questions for any nonmaximalist, even one who doesn't come to truthmaking with the explanatory paradigm that seeks to analyze truth in terms of truthmakers (or lack thereof).[32] Jago motivates his view as follows. Suppose, as per nonmaximalism, <There are no red pandas in my living room> is a truthmaker gap. Despite protests to the contrary from Sorensen and Veber, this is something I can and presumably do know. Hence, <I know that there are no red pandas in my living room> is true. Given that "know" is factive, this epistemic truth entails the original negative truth. But the claim about my state of knowledge is a "positive" truth, and therefore a truth with a truthmaker. What, then, makes it true that I have the knowledge in question? Call that object "E." E is an excluder of red pandas in my living room; its existence is incompatible with any such things. But the existence of such objects is precisely what puzzles the critics of maximalism in the first place. Absences, totalities, and negative facts are said to be metaphysically problematic because they posit necessary connections between distinct existences. A "unicorn absence," whatever it is, prohibits the existence of unicorns, which are an entirely different sort of entity. As Lewis puts it, "its *raison d'être* would require it to be involved in mysterious necessary connections" (2001b: 611). So for E to do its truthmaking job, it must be of the same problematic kind that maximalists embrace, and nonmaximalists try to avoid. On the other hand, if the nonmaximalist can come up with some account of E that avoids the problematic implications, then the maximalist can take up that position as well. Either way, the nonmaximalist boasts no advantage. Jago concludes, in effect, that "the nonmaximalist account collapses into maximalism" (2012b: 915).

What I think Jago's argument reveals is that anything that entails a truthmaker gap is likewise a truthmaker gap. Anyone who accepts, as I do, that truthmaking follows entailment is committed to that consequence. It also shows the dangers at stake in attempting to divide the set of truths into

[31] Cf. Lewis 2001b: 610. Likewise, one need not, alongside Simons (2005: 255), think that a truth lacking a truthmaker is tantamount to being "true by default." Nor need the nonmaximalist think that truths with truthmakers are somehow the "primary" truths (as in Forrest and Khlentzos 2000: 3 and Mellor 2009: 272).

[32] See also Simpson (2014) and Skiles (2014) for responses to Jago's argument.

the "positive" and the "negative." (Jago adds to these a third category of "derivative" truths.) Nonmaximalists should not articulate their views in terms of general principles linking the presence or absence of truth with truths being positive or negative. Negative existentials lack truthmakers not because they have some quality of being negative. They lack truthmakers because that is the ontologically responsible attitude to take toward them when we inspect them and see what they say about the world. Nonmaximalism is not maximalism with respect to the positive truths. I do not know what a positive truth is – every truth stakes out a claim about the way the world is. Claims about the way the world *isn't* are themselves claims about the way the world *is*. Any truth, regardless of what it's about, can be prefaced with "It *is* the case that."

If <*p*> is a truthmaker gap, then if S knows that *p*, so too is <S knows that *p*> a truthmaker gap. But again, to make this concession (if it even is a concession) is not to say that these epistemic claims are to be dealt with in an ontologically frivolous matter. I know that there are no red pandas in my living room. What sort of ontology needs to be around for this to be true? The nonmaximalist does not answer "nothing." To think otherwise is again to conflate the two kinds of truthmaker gap. Instead, the nonmaximalist considers the case at hand. My living room would need to exist, as would I. My mind needs to have certain features as well. It has to have the concept RED PANDA, the belief in question needs to exist, and my mind needs to be in a state that is appropriately related to the room such that my belief is justified in the right way. All of that needs to be in place if I am truly to know the fact at hand. All of these things together *might* necessitate and therefore make true <I justifiably believe that there are no red pandas in my living room>. But they don't guarantee the truth of the negative existential in question, since adding features of me and my mental states into the picture doesn't itself guarantee the absence of the lesser pandas. This bit of ontological accounting remains crucial, even if the end product fails to be a necessitator.[33] Anyone who accepts such epistemic truths must be prepared to take on such commitments. An eliminativist about the mind (e.g., Churchland 1981), for instance, has no business

[33] Perhaps one might respond here that I am betraying an implicit commitment to nonnecessitarianism. Why not simply call these grounds, though not necessitators, the truthmaker, and give up the necessitation account of truthmaking? Then I could be a maximalist, albeit one that defines truthmaking without necessitation. The quickest response is that I would still be a nonmaximalist, since there are no positive grounds at all for many negative existentials. The truth of <There are no unicorns> imposes no positive ontological commitments, only negative ones, and so there is no nonnecessitating truthmaking candidate here.

claiming it's true that I know anything, supposing that knowledge requires belief. If beliefs don't exist, no proposition that attributes knowledge to me can be true. This sort of observation is still valid, even after one adopts the nonmaximalist position that the proper ontological grounds for a truth can fail to necessitate it.

The lesson to draw from Jago's dilemma is that truthmaker gaps are perhaps more common than has been previously thought. Ironically, this observation is a boon to the nonmaximalist. The more common truthmaker gaps are, the more principled the nonmaximalist's position is. Nor should the spread of truthmaker gaps be thought to undermine the basic point of truthmaker theory. Truthmaker theory is a call to ontological accountability, and truthmaker gaps themselves are no threat to that. Some truths require necessitating grounds, some require nonnecessitating grounds, and some require no grounds. To determine what is required in particular cases, we need to attend to the details of the individual truths. Other approaches that demand necessitating grounds for all truths might be theoretically simpler, but they won't be correct. What sorts of grounds are required will depend on a variety of ontological positions, such as which of the supervenience principles – Bigelow's "strong" supervenience or Lewis's "weak" supervenience – is true.

The dilemma also brings to the fore the need for caution when it comes to embracing general principles about truthmaking. The divide between truths with truthmakers and truths without cannot be drawn along a boundary between "positive" and "negative" truths. In fact, dispensing with the need for articulating the supposed difference between these kinds of truths is a benefit of my approach.

4.5 Conclusion

In a chapter dedicated to the question "Which truths have truthmakers?," one might expect a comprehensive answer: all truths, all contingent truths, all atomic truths, or all positive truths, for example. My answer might, therefore, be disappointing. It is simply: not every truth has a truthmaker. None of the general, easily statable answers is adequate; what that means is that the business of truthmaking is not a simple one, and not one that can be developed in isolation of particular cases. Negative existentials, it seems to me, provide a plentiful source of counterexamples to maximalism. They are enough to problematize both global and contingent maximalism, and Jago calls attention to cases that are counterexamples to "positive" maximalism. There simply is no easy answer to the question of which truths

have truthmakers. I do find myself agreeing with Rodriguez-Pereyra that "the members of an important class of synthetic true propositions" are the ones with truthmakers (2005: 18), though this claim is virtually empty. As I argue later, only synthetic truths are nontrivially made true, and I already have clearly announced my view that not all synthetic truths have truthmakers. What, then, is left to fill the important class? Rodriguez-Pereyra insists that it includes negative existentials; I've argued that it does not. The only way to better specify the answer is to explore more and more cases, as I shall do in later chapters. It should be clear, then, how my approach differs from the way truthmaker theory is often practiced. We should not *begin* with some heavily committed theoretical principle like maximalism (or some restricted version of it); those principles are – as Armstrong noted but didn't follow through on – hypotheses to be tested. These principles continue to be tested in the pages that follow.

My fairly laissez-faire attitude toward truthmaker gaps might be taken to deplete my view of any resources for challenging metaphysical views that are suspected of neglecting their ontological duties. Consider presentism, for example. If truths without truthmakers are not inherently problematic, what is the danger in taking truths about the past to lack truthmakers? This line of thinking presupposes that the admission of truthmaker gaps is the beginning of a slippery slope to ontological nihilism and irresponsibility. There is no reason to believe that. It's true that those who wield the club of maximalism can pound presentists into submission. But maximalism isn't true – I've argued against it, and challenged the few arguments that favor it. Had maximalism been true, perhaps the case against presentism would be easier to make. But the fact that it's not should not lead anyone to despair. A truthmaking argument against views like presentism can still be mounted. Maximalism is not necessary to capture what's right about truthmaker theory, which is the absolute necessity of honest ontological accountability. Presentists, I shall argue later (see Chapter 10), can still be shown to be unaccountable, even if maximalism is false.

CHAPTER 5

A Catalog of Objections

So far I have defended my view on a number of fundamental questions about truthmaking. I have argued that truthmaking is not about explaining truth, but about preserving ontological honesty. I have defended metaphysical necessitation as being both necessary and sufficient for truthmaking, and argued that not all truths have truthmakers. At this point, the hard work begins of putting truthmaker theory to work in metaphysics and beyond. But before turning to the application of truthmaker theory, I do want to pause to meet some of the objections that have been offered, globally, against truthmaker theory. Many are deeply opposed to the enterprise, and little has been said to assuage such critics. In this chapter I attempt to meet each of the major objections that have been offered against truthmaker theory.

One objection we have met and dispensed with already: truthmaker theory is maximalist or nothing, and maximalism is unsustainable. So truthmaker theory should be rejected. This is the argument of Dodd (2002a, 2007), Merricks (2007), and Tallant (2018), and the previous chapter responds to it. Maximalist truthmaker theory is required only of explanation-first truthmaking, and that is the wrong perspective to take.

Sometimes objections are offered against truthmaker theory as a whole that are better directed against particular theories of truthmaking. (This is one way of reading the argument in Dodd [2002a], for instance.) For example, one might be metaphysically suspicious of entities such as tropes or states of affairs. These sorts of entities have figured prominently in well-known theories of truthmaking (e.g., Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984 and Armstrong 2004, respectively), and it is understandable why some critics take the positing of such entities to be necessary for any worthwhile theory of truthmaking. I have already cautioned against interpreting truthmaker theory as being antecedently committed to such entities. There are nominalist-friendly theories of truthmaking (e.g., Lewis 2003 and Asay 2013d), and I will return to them in Chapter 9. Worries about particular

commitments of particular views of truthmaking should not be thought of as objections to the enterprise of truthmaking as a whole.

My concern in this chapter is with those who do object to truthmaker theory as an enterprise, and not just particular instances of it. I first respond to the objections offered by Timothy Williamson and Kit Fine, and then to a cluster of philosophers I call "truthmaking deflationists." I conclude by considering possible objections from those embedded in the grounding literature.

5.1 Williamson

Timothy Williamson's rejection of truthmaker theory stems from what he judges to be its incompatibility with his "necessitist" metaphysics which maintains that to be is necessarily to be (1999, 2013). If all existing objects exist necessarily, and truthmakers necessitate their respective truths, then every truth with a truthmaker is necessary. Suppose T is a truthmaker for $<p>$. That entails (on most views, including mine) that it's necessary that if T exists, $<p>$ is true. So if it's necessary that T exists, then it's necessary that $<p>$ is true. The key ingredient in Williamson's argument is the converse Barcan formula: if, necessarily, everything is F, then everything is necessarily F. Williamson presents his reader with a choice: you may accept either the converse Barcan formula, or that truths have truthmakers, but you cannot have both.[1]

I suggested back in Section 3.3.1 that Williamson should respond to his own argument by articulating an account of the truthmaking relation that does not involve necessitation. After all, Williamson's acceptance of necessitism does not give him full license to shirk ontological responsibility. Regardless of his modal status, Socrates belongs in the ontology of anyone who believes it to be true that Socrates exists. One lesson of Williamson's argument is that necessitists need to understand truthmaking differently, given their background metaphysical commitments.[2] Hence, Williamson's argument does not undermine truthmaker theory as a whole; what it brings out is that, traditionally, truthmaker theorists have been committed

[1] I discuss Williamson's argument and my response to it in greater detail in Asay 2016b.

[2] On Williamson's view, while objects exist necessarily, they are not necessarily concrete. So he might make use of that distinction in his revival of truthmaking: T is a truthmaker for $<p>$ only if in every world in which T is *concrete*, $<p>$ is true. (Thanks go to an external reviewer for this suggestion.) I would note that objects still ought to be truthmakers even when they're not concrete. I presumably make it true that I exist, even in worlds where I am not concrete.

to a nonnecessitist metaphysics, given how they have articulated and analyzed the relation of truthmaking.

Let us suppose that Williamson is correct that those who do accept necessitarian truthmaking must reject the converse Barcan formula. Is that a major cost? Williamson believes so. On the one hand, he thinks that accepting the converse Barcan formula has positive consequences for one's modal logic and metaphysics. On the other, he thinks that the truthmaker theorists' insights can be satisfied by accepting a very weak principle. According to the standard account, to say that a truth has a truthmaker is to say that there is an object that necessitates the truth, where "there is" is to be understood as objectual quantification, and thus as ontologically committing. Williamson formally renders the truthmaker theorists' main thesis as follows (though it should be noted that it presumes maximalism):

(TM) $\Box(A \supset \exists x \Box(\exists y\ x=y \supset A))$

He suggests an alternative principle, which does not rely on objectual quantification. He defends the alternative with a rhetorical question: "Why not treat the platitude as simply connecting the constant A in sentence position with a variable in sentence position?" (1999: 258). His suggestion yields the following principle:

(TM*) $\Box(A \supset \exists p(p\ \&\ \Box(p \supset A)))$

Notice how the variable "p" ranges over sentential expressions, not objects, as "x" and "y" do in the earlier principle. If "A" is "Snow is white," then (TM) entails that there needs to be some object in the world that guarantees that snow is white. But all (TM*) requires is that there is some *p* such that *p* and, necessarily, if *p* then snow is white. And of course there is some such *p*: let "p" be replaced by "snow is white."

(TM*) is no truthmaking principle. Satisfying it does nothing to ensure that one is attending to one's ontological accounting. If I commit to the truth of <Snow is white>, (TM) directs me to find something in my ontology that necessitates it. (TM*) does nothing of the sort. At best, it tells me that if I commit to the truth of <Snow is white>, then I should commit to the truth of <Snow is white>. If (TM*) is all one needs in order to complete one's cognitive accounting, then such accounting could be satisfied by one who took on absolutely zero ontological commitments. (I return to this sort of objection below, in Section 5.3.) After all, accepting instances of (TM*) will never lead to any ontological commitments. That is the simple reply to Williamson's rhetorical question.

Truthmaker theory's ambitions cannot be so easily dismissed; Williamson's proffered principle is a mere distraction.[3] As a result, the choice of the converse Barcan formula over truthmaking is not as easily made as Williamson makes it out to be. Plus, the converse Barcan formula comes with its own costs, notably the consequence of necessary existence. The modal collapse that Williamson accepts regarding existence is to my mind no less objectionable than the modal collapse regarding truth to which he objects. The very idea of necessary existence, as I've already noted, has had its coherence called into question.

Williamson also objects to truthmaker theory on the grounds that it requires the "postulation of such individuals of unobvious standing" (1999: 264). He is referring to objects like states of affairs and tropes. As a result, he sees an ontological advantage in accepting the converse Barcan formula over necessitarian truthmaking. Here I first reiterate that it cannot be assumed from the outset that truthmaker theory must be committed to such entities – there are other metaphysical views available, and such entities are not just ad hoc posits of truthmaker theory. Plus, there are nonmaximalist approaches to truthmaker theory that avoid some contentious metaphysical posits (such as totality states of affairs, absences, and negative facts). Second, Williamson's view is no stranger to entities of unobvious standing, so his choice enjoys no obvious ontological advantage. *All* entities, as a result of Williamson's view, are of unobvious standing, given their quite literal God-like trait of necessary existence. There are also, in Williamson's worldview, plenty of rather unfamiliar entities, such as the thing that Wittgenstein could have but did not father (Williamson 1998: 258). Williamson also appeals to entities he calls "possible facts" that are nonconcrete, non-spatiotemporal, and somehow fail to make anything true, despite their existence. These are hardly more obvious entities than the concrete states of affairs that exist in space and time, as on Armstrong's view. Williamson's preferred ontology may be correct, but he scores no points for obviousness.

5.2 Fine

Kit Fine offers his own critique of truthmaker theory, one which comes in the context of his defense of his preferred theory of metaphysical

[3] Cf. McGrath (2003), which also suggests an alternative, ontology-free truthmaking principle. Like Williamson's, its ontological vacuity is precisely why it is a nonstarter as a principle of truthmaking.

grounding (2012: 43–46). He raises four objections, each of which turns on some misreading of truthmaker theory and its ambitions.[4]

Fine's first two objections involve what he takes to be truthmaker theorists' restricted account of what can stand in the truthmaking relation. On the one hand, he thinks it's unduly restrictive to claim that only *truths* require ontological grounds. On the other, he thinks it's unduly restrictive to claim that only existing objects can provide ontological grounds. As to the first charge, Fine is bringing to his reading of truthmaker theory his own theoretical ambition to provide a comprehensive account of metaphysical grounding. Fine is interested in giving a theory of ground, wherever the notion might arise in philosophy. For example, one might want to claim that mental states are grounded by physical states, or that secondary qualities are grounded by primary qualities. These cases of ground are not cases of a relation holding between a truth and an object. So truthmaker theory cannot account for them.[5]

The appropriate response to Fine's first objection is fully concessive. Yes, truthmaker theory does not offer a comprehensive, general theory of what it is for one thing to ground another. But that was never its ambition. Perhaps truthmaking can be conceived of as a particular species of grounding – it involves the one unique case of true truth-bearers being grounded in existing objects.[6] But no one should interpret truthmaker theory as giving the final word on every instance of metaphysical dependence. It is no commitment of truthmaker theory that things other than truths cannot stand in various relations of metaphysical dependence.

As for Fine's second objection, that only objects are allowed to provide grounds, my response is that, quite literally, there is no more permissive stance to be had. As I've already argued, every object is a truthmaker. Every last thing in the universe is a truthmaker for some truth or other. So there couldn't be something that the truthmaker theorist disallows from being a truthmaker, since the truthmaker theorist can admit everything into the truthmaking relation. The option that Fine has in mind, and which he believes truthmaker theorists are ignoring, is that "something relational" could provide truthmaking grounds, not just something existing: "Perhaps it can lie in something relational, *a* standing in the relation R to *b*, or the negation of something relational, *a* not standing in relation R to *b*, or in

[4] I discuss Fine's argument and my response to it in greater detail in Asay 2017.
[5] See also deRosset 2017.
[6] This is Schaffer's view (2010). See also Griffith 2014, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2015, and Asay 2017. I discuss the relationship between truthmaking and grounding in Section 5.4.

something of some other form" (2012: 44). Fine faces a dilemma here. If by "something relational" he means a thing that is relational, then truthmaker theorists can and do use them as truthmakers. Consider Armstrong's view of truthmakers. Suppose R is a relational universal, and *a* and *b* stand in it. In that case, <*a* stands in R to *b*> is true, and made true by a state of affairs composed by *a*, *b*, and R. This is a something that is relational if anything is, and plays important truthmaking roles in Armstrong's metaphysics. But if by "something relational" Fine has in mind a something that is not a *thing* at all, then he's no longer talking about truthmaking. Fine's language suggests that he thinks truthmaking grounds are such that they can be negated. But objects cannot be negated, unless they are propositional objects. Sentences and propositions can be negated, but these are the things that are made true. In effect, Fine's preferred grounds are just more truths: perhaps <*p*> is grounded by some negated proposition. But then we don't have a truthmaker for <*p*> yet; if <*p*> is grounded by <¬*q*>, then we need to know what the truthmaker for <¬*q*> is. The option that Fine believes truthmaker theorists are wrongly ignoring is either something that has belonged to truthmaker theory from the beginning, or irrelevant to the truthmaking enterprise.

Fine's third objection is that truthmaker theory cannot account for various hierarchies that he detects among truths. He suggests, for instance, that normative facts are grounded by natural facts, which in turn are grounded by physical facts, which are grounded by microphysical facts. Truthmaker theorists, by contrast, would provide a truthmaker for the normative fact in question, and that is the end of the story. The object that makes it true is not another truth in the hierarchy, but something out in the world. Because truthmaking is cross-categorial in this way (usually leading from truth-bearer to non-truth-bearer), it cannot account for the chains of dependencies between truths.

This objection is in some ways a version of the first, and deserves the same reply. It is not a part of truthmaker theory to show what the chains of dependencies between truths are; truthmaker theorists are interested in the particular dependency that obtains between truths and worldly entities. Truthmaker theorists are interested first and foremost in *what there is*, not in what the grand "alethic structure" of all the truths is. That said, it would be problematic if truthmaker theorists had to deny such hierarchies, but there is no reason to believe they would. In fact, the two ideas can work together. Presumably, if <*p*> is grounded by <*q*>, which is grounded by <*r*>, then they may all have the same truthmaker. (If grounding includes entailment, then – on my view – a truthmaker for one will be a truthmaker

for anything it grounds.) Hence, truthmaker theory and grounding theory are complementary: insights into one could be useful for thinking about the other. There is no reason to see Fine's interests and truthmaker theorists' as somehow being in competition or inconsistent with one another.

Fine's final objection is that truthmaker theory is plagued by a number of trivialities. In making this objection, he claims that truthmaking is "usually explicated in modal terms," such that metaphysical necessitation is sufficient for truthmaking (2012: 45). As we have seen, this claim is empirically false. Very few truthmaker theorists nowadays accept that necessitation is sufficient for truthmaking – those like me who do are few and far between. But given that I do accept the sufficiency of necessitation, I am susceptible to this objection. Some cases – such as the trivialization of truthmaking for necessary truths – are said to make the truthmaking relation "too liberal" (Fine 2012: 45). I have addressed such concerns already, in Section 3.3.1. Other purported cases of trivialization are that for any true $<p>$, there is always an entity – the fact that p – that provides a truthmaker. This claim is ontologically naïve, of course, because it depends on an ontological proliferation of the worst sort. From its inception, the whole point of truthmaker theory – evident to anyone reading Russell's logical atomism – is to avoid positing some unique piece of ontology to match every truth. No ontologically responsible truthmaker theorist should blithely grant Fine's claim that for every true $<p>$ there is some entity called "the fact that p."[7]

5.3 Deflationary Truthmaking

The next set of objections are connected by the thought that truthmaking's ontological ambitions are easily accomplished, such that the substantive ontological inquiry characteristic of truthmaker theory is unnecessary and ontologically profligate. I call this perspective "deflationary truthmaking" in virtue of its close analogy to deflationary thinking about truth.[8] Deflationists about truth (e.g., Horwich 1990) do not reject the notion of truth altogether, but instead think that the project of offering a substantive theory of truth rests on a mistake. Truth does not need to be given some analysis in terms of correspondence, coherence, or the like. Instead, simple attention to the T-schema is all that is needed to give a fully satisfying

[7] Fiocco (2013) comes closest to accepting such a consequence.

[8] See Baron (2015b) and Asay and Baron's "Deflating Deflationary Truthmaking" (2020) for further discussion of this objection, and our reply. I thank Sam for many worthwhile discussions of the objection.

theory of truth. That is, a theory of truth can nearly be exhausted by the instances of the schema

(T) <*p*> is true if and only if *p*.

Every theory of truth accepts the instances of this schema (or one formulated in terms of sentences); what distinguishes deflationary theories is that they add little or nothing to the instances of the schema. In particular, they resist defining truth in terms of further substantive notions (like correspondence and fact).

Deflationary theories of truthmaking employ a similar strategy. They point to a different schema:

(B) <*p*> is true because *p*.

The instances of (B) are then said to offer explanations of truths: for every predication of truth, there is an answer for why it is the case. Why is <Grass is green> true? Because grass is green. Why is <Snow is white> true? Because snow is white. Schema (B), all by itself, guarantees that in every instance of a true predication of truth, there is always, *a priori* no less, an asymmetric explanation available that does not appeal to truth.[9] With the B-schema in hand, deflationists about truthmaking can claim to have accounted for everything there is to say about truthmaking, but without having to posit anything ontologically contentious. What the B-schema mandates is that for any truth-bearer that one accepts as true, one accepts the corresponding instance of the B-schema. And that's just another truth to accept; no ontology is called for. If one prefers, one can turn what a truth-bearer says into a noun phrase, and cite "it" as the truthmaker. For instance: <Grass is green> is true because "grass's being green" exists. Of course, "grass's being green" is not the name of any entity; what substantive truthmaker theorists get wrong is that there needs to be something, ontologically speaking, to be a truthmaker. As Jennifer Hornsby sums up the deflationists' position: "once we see that there is no need to fight for such things [i.e., truthmakers], we shall not find this question pressing. We shall see that indeed they come cheap, and without any disputable metaphysics" (2005: 46).[10]

There is one important disanalogy between deflationary theories of truth and deflationary theories of truthmaking. That is that the latter is,

[9] Cameron claims there to be counterexamples to the B-schema (2008d: 123). I am willing to let them pass, and lodge my complaint against truthmaking deflationists elsewhere.

[10] Other expressions of deflationary truthmaking can be found in Kroon 2000, Dodd 2002a and 2007, McGrath 2003, Melia 2005, Schnieder 2006b, Horwich 2008, Sanson and Caplan 2010, Williamson 2013, Rychter 2014, and Tallant 2018.

in essence, a contradiction in terms. Truthmaking deflated of all its substance has no ontological content. But to be concerned with truthmaking *just is* to be concerned with ontology. A "truthmaker theory" that has no implications for ontology is not worthy of the name. The supposed advantage of relying on the B-schema – its ontological austerity – turns out to be the deflationists' undoing. It might be true that <Grass is green> is true because grass is green. But that concession does nothing to answer the question of what sort of ontology is needed to ensure that one's cognitive accounting is properly aligned. Consider the kinds of truths that motivated truthmaker theory in the first place. Suppose a phenomenalist attempts to explain away the idea that things can exist unperceived by claiming that it's true that if someone went to the quad, they would have a tree-like sense datum. Had the phenomenalist responded to a truthmaker demand by saying that <If someone went to the quad, they would have a tree-like sense datum> is true because if someone went to the quad, they would have a tree-like sense datum, it would be obvious that the original demand had not been met. Being told the counterfactual again when demanding a truthmaker for the counterfactual is unsatisfactory. What this shows is that the B-schema never answers the original question of what sort of ontology is needed to ground any particular truth. Because it doesn't answer such questions, it remains silent on the real truthmaking question. Reliance on (B) is not really a "deflationary" approach to truthmaker theory: it's not truthmaker theory at all.

To dramatize the objection to the deflationist, consider a particularly extreme version of it. According to this view, all the usual propositions are true. Grass is green, snow is white, and penguins don't fly. If asked what the truthmakers are for these various claims, the deflationist rejects the question, and notes that <Grass is green> is true because grass is green, <Snow is white> is true because snow is white, and <Penguins don't fly> is true because penguins don't fly. What the view refuses to do is countenance the existence of anything. If asked for an ontological inventory, deflationists offer an empty list. The deflationists are happy to commit to every instance of the B-schema for every truth they're committed to. But such commitments are just to more truths; no *ontological* commitment is ever required. This sort of truthmaking deflationist thinks that truth *never* requires ontology; all truth requires is commitment to the B-schema. It seems to me quite clear that such a view is the antithesis of truthmaker theory, not an efficient way around it. Such a deflationist does nothing to countenance the basic ideas behind truthmaking; the B-schema reveals none of the insight needed to explore the ontological question of what there is.

The deflationist might retort here that such an ontological nihilist is incoherent. The deflationist about truthmaking doesn't maintain that *nothing* exists; the deflationist claim is instead that *contentious* entities that are the focus of truthmaker theory – states of affairs, tropes, facts – are unnecessary. Here, for instance, is Julian Dodd:

> <*a* is *F*> is true because *a* instantiates *F*. For this proposition to be true, its sub-propositional constituents must refer to an object and a property respectively, and the object must instantiate the property. Given that this is so, the truth of <*a* is *F*> commits us ontologically only to *a* and to *F*. A truthmaker would not seem to be required. (2007: 396)

Note that Dodd begins by citing an instance of the B-schema, but then he reads more into it. He assumes that "*a*" refers to an object, and "*F*" refers to a property. In so doing, Dodd goes beyond what the instance of the B-schema actually says. Consider, for example, <7 is prime>. Dodd would have to contend that "7" refers to an object, but *that* is an ontologically contentious view, and one which many disagree with. Whether properties exist at all is an ontologically contentious issue. (Quine would certainly disagree that <*a* is *F*> commits one to *F*. It commits one only to there being *F*s.) So what Dodd reveals here is that he has his own view about how to read the truthmaking commitments off of truths. Dodd is a *fellow* substantive truthmaker theorist, not the underminer of it that he takes himself to be.

5.4 Grounding vs. Truthmaking

The final objection I shall consider is the claim that truthmaking is an inferior alternative to grounding: there is nothing that truthmaking does that grounding doesn't do better. Or, at best, truthmaking is just a part of the theory of grounding, and so can be subsumed under it. The bottom line is that there is no independent research project of interest to be pursued by self-styled truthmaker theorists.

This sort of objection is the ultimate thesis of Fine's critique (2012), whose flaws I have already identified. But I sense that it is implicit in the writing of many who take grounding, but not truthmaking, seriously. There are a number of responses to this attitude that may be given. First, the only reply necessary may be that grounding and truthmaking have different theoretical ambitions, and so they are not in fact theoretical competitors. If, for example, grounding is ultimately interested in giving an account of the "alethic structure" of truths – that is to say, it is dedicated to articulating the various hierarchies that obtain between truths

vis-à-vis levels of fundamentality – then it has a separate theoretical goal. Truthmaker theory is interested in coming up with an ontology, not an inventory of various dependency relations.

Suppose, though, that truthmaker theory and grounding theory do share a common ambition. If grounding theory does have the goal of articulating what sort of ontology is needed in order to account for everything we hold true, then truthmaker theory is a part of grounding theory, and no less relevant as a result. Truthmaker theorists, therefore, have considerable insight to share regarding one essential component of the theory of grounding. Truthmaker theory fills the void in theories of grounding when it comes to the question of what the ontological grounds for truths are.

It might be thought, however, that if truthmaking is just an instance of grounding, then it has nothing to add beyond what general theories of grounding already say. Truthmaking is just a straightforward application of the general theory, and so not something that represents an independent research program. But this objection misses the heterogeneity in the different kinds of grounding. Suppose I have a pet puffin Peter. Peter is the truthmaker for the proposition <Peter exists>. He provides the ontological grounds for it; my ontological due diligence isn't satisfied regarding my belief that it's true that Peter exists until I add Peter to my ontology. But Peter might be grounds for <Peter exists> in a very different way. Not only is the proposition true, it also exists. And depending on one's view about the nature of propositions, it might be that the existence of <Peter exists> also depends on Peter: the proposition wouldn't exist if Peter didn't. (For example, on "Russellian" accounts of propositions (e.g., Salmon 1986), propositions are composed by the objects and properties they are about.) Hence, Peter may well ground <Peter exists> in two entirely different ways. Grounding theory that doesn't pay attention to the specific kind of grounding that truthmaking may represent is needlessly blind. As Griffith puts it, "Truthmaking may be a species of grounding, which entails that a definition of truthmaking includes the core notion of grounding, but it is different in many ways from other species. These differences need to be explored in detail" (2014: 213).[11]

[11] For more on the relationship between truthmaking and grounding, see Schaffer 2010, Tahko 2013, Griffith 2014, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2015, Yip 2015, Asay 2017, Cameron 2018, Jago 2018: chapter 6, and Saenz (in press).

PART II

Applications

CHAPTER 6

Truth

The previous chapters laid out the positive case for taking truthmaking seriously, outlined my answers to some of the fundamental questions of truthmaker theory, and responded to some basic objections to the enterprise. In the chapters to follow, I make the case for truthmaker theory by showing what advances it can showcase in various corners of philosophy, and for metaphysics itself. In this second part of the book, I consider how truthmaking provides theoretical illumination when it comes to the nature of truth, analyticity, and realism. These analyses are open to virtually anyone who embraces the basic idea of truthmaking. That is to say, they do not depend upon the more contentious views of my own that I have argued for already (such as necessitation being sufficient for truthmaking). Those who disagree with me on some of the basics of truthmaking should still be able to adopt my overall views about how truthmaking relates to truth, analyticity, and realism. This chapter targets the nature of truth. My thesis is that truthmaking motivates a *rejection* of the correspondence theory of truth, and supports a *metaphysically* (but not conceptually) deflationary theory of truth.

The chapter begins by delineating the separate tasks of truthmaker theory and theories of truth. The two kinds of theories can be separated, and so are in principle distinct. However, history has not always treated them that way. I propose that one way of understanding the distinction between substantive and deflationary theories of truth is in terms of their contrasting relationship to truthmaking. I then argue that truthmaking cannot be put to work in a theory of truth. Consequently, truthmaking motivates the rejection of substantive accounts of the *property* of truth. (It ultimately remains neutral regarding the substance of the *concept* of truth.) As a result, I show how correspondence theorists – traditional allies of the notion of truthmaking – are threatened by my approach to truthmaking, whereas deflationists – who frequently see an opponent in the truthmaker theorist – have found a friend.[1]

[1] Much of this chapter follows the discussion in Asay (in press b).

6.1 Theories of Truthmaking and Theories of Truth

As I have argued, to be a truthmaker theorist is to use the tools of truthmaker theory to investigate metaphysical questions. Most fundamentally, truthmaker theory aims at answering the question "What is there?" It proceeds by asking what the truthmakers are for all that we take to be true. In developing a theory of truthmaking, one needs to consider what the truthmaking relation is, which truths stand in it, and what objects serve as truthmakers. A fully comprehensive theory of truthmakers will produce a comprehensive ontology: anything that is, is a truthmaker.

Accordingly, truthmaker theory properly understood is at bottom an ontological theory, a theory about what our universe contains. It is not, therefore, fundamentally a theory about the nature of *truth*. A theory about the nature of truth should reveal what it is to *be* true, what it is that is shared in common between the members of the class of all and only things that are true. What it is to be true is a conceptual-cum-metaphysical issue that requires an examination into the property and concept of truth. What makes some particular truth true is an ontological question that need not have any bearing on the former matter (cf. Khlentzos 2000: 142).

The theory of truth focuses on two distinctions. First is the distinction between the *concept* of truth (hereafter "TRUTH") and the *property* of truth (hereafter "*truth*"). Second is the distinction between *substantive* and *deflationary* theories of truth. The investigation into the concept of truth begins with the question of what sorts of thoughts the possession of TRUTH allows us to have. Our fourteenth-century ancestors could not have contemplated the thought that Barack Obama would be president of the United States concurrently with Justin Trudeau serving as the prime minister of Canada. They lacked too many of the requisite concepts for understanding such a thought. Which thoughts does TRUTH allow us to think? Obvious cases would be those like <It is true that snow is white> and <"Grass is green" is true>. But I have argued elsewhere that the range is far larger; in fact, I argue that thinking *any* propositional thought requires possession of TRUTH, for truth in some sense is a part of every propositional thought.[2] This "omnipresence" of truth – the inspiration for which I take from Frege – reveals that truth is among our most basic and fundamental concepts, a concept without which, as Davidson aptly claims, "we would have no concepts at all" (1996: 264).

[2] See Asay 2013a, 2013b, and (in press a).

In brief, the case for omnipresence lies in the fact that it offers the best explanation of a wide variety of "alethic phenomena." These include the fact that thoughts of the form <It is true that *p*> are cognitively indistinguishable from thoughts of the form <*p*>, the fact that instances of <It is true that *p*> and <*p*> are logically equivalent, and the fact that one cannot believe, assert, pretend, or deny a proposition without understanding what it would be for that proposition to be true. Furthermore, alternative accounts of TRUTH possession (e.g., Horwich 1990 and Künne 2003: 51), connect the concept too closely to competence with the *word* "true," and falsely predict that sophisticated speakers of a "Tarski-approved" language that does not contain its own semantic machinery thereby lack the concept of truth.

Because of omnipresence, I infer that TRUTH is primitive: it cannot be defined or analyzed without circularity into concepts that are more fundamental. As such, it offers a nontrivial contribution to the composition of thoughts, and enjoys a host of rich conceptual connections to other basic concepts such as belief, assertion, and knowledge. For all these reasons, I reject a deflationary understanding of the concept TRUTH. Deflationists advocate the view that TRUTH is a lackluster concept, one which stands in no explanatory relationships to other concepts. As Michael Williams puts it, "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 Horwich 1990 and Williams 2002). The expressive functions Williams has in mind here are the familiar abilities of "true" to express infinite disjunctions and conjunctions, and make blind assertions. That is, the "true" in <Everything Hume says is true> and <Something Kant says is true> allows us to say what would otherwise take an infinite amount of time to say: if Hume said that snow is green, then snow is green, and if Hume said that snow is blue, then snow is blue, and so on. And either Kant said that snow is green and snow is green, or Kant said that snow is blue and snow is blue, and so on. I can also use "true" when asserting that what Phil said last night isn't true, even if I don't remember or even understand what Phil said last night. Any language with a truth predicate can accomplish these expressive tasks; that much everyone should agree on. What makes deflationary views distinctive is their denial that the notion of truth has any importance beyond enabling these expressive conveniences.

My commitment to the omnipresence and fundamentality of truth marks my break with full-bore deflationism about TRUTH. However, that

commitment is neither here nor there when it comes to my views about truthmaking, which are neutral on the question of deflationary versus primitivist conceptions of truth. As I shall argue, truthmaker theorists ought to choose between deflationism and primitivism as regards TRUTH. The *property* of truth, though, is a different matter. Here I advocate a fully deflationary view. Philosophers divide in their understanding of what properties are. For some they are universals (Armstrong 1997), for others they are tropes (Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984), and still others treat them as classes of individuals (Lewis 1983). Whether or not there is a property of truth is a question that cannot be asked independently of some idea of what constitutes a property. For some, that "true" is a predicate is sufficient to show that there is a property *truth* (e.g., Shoemaker 1979: 331). For some, that some things are true is sufficient to show that there is a property *truth*. But these are not metaphysically discriminating notions of properties. As Lewis puts it, properties in this "abundant" sense "carve reality at the joints – and everywhere else as well" (1983: 346). What substantivists about *truth* believe is that the property of truth is not a metaphysically innocuous or trivial property. It is – to borrow the phrase of Pedersen and Wright – an "alethically potent" property, a property that makes things true (2013: 2). Horwich (1990), for instance, happily admits that truth is a "logical property," but denies that it is a property of any metaphysical interest. So the real disagreement between deflationists and substantivists about *truth* is not about whether it exists, but what sort of property it is.

In light of these considerations, I have argued that substantivists take *truth* to be a "sparse" property, whereas deflationists admit that it is merely an abundant property (Asay 2013b, 2014).[3] As David Lewis (1983) presents the distinction, sparse properties are those that account for the genuine resemblances between objects and provide them their causal powers. An electron's possession of *being electrically charged* accounts for its resemblance to other electrons and its powers of attraction and repulsion; an electron's possession of *being within fourteen kilometers of an amateur production of a Shakespeare play*, by contrast, confers it no genuine resemblance with the other objects in its vicinity, and gives it no causal power. Substantivists about *truth* treat it as a sparse property, one among the set of "ontologically significant properties of objects, those in terms of which the world's work is done" (Armstrong 2004: 17). Deflationists about *truth* regard it as a merely abundant property, thereby defending

[3] See also Edwards 2013 and 2018: chapter 2, and Wyatt 2016 for criticism.

the idea that *truth* is not a causally potent property, and that the class of truths is not a homogenous collection marked by a metaphysically significant kind of resemblance.[4]

Truthmaking, I argue, offers an argument in favor of *metaphysical deflationism*, i.e., the thesis that the property *truth* is a metaphysically innocuous, abundant property.[5] The main idea behind the argument is that once an ontology of truthmakers is secure, the need for a metaphysically substantive property *truth* becomes otiose. Put simply, the basic truthmaking idea is that truths are true in virtue of the existence of their truthmakers, not in virtue of their possession of some alethic property. Consider Armstrong's approach to truthmaking. He makes extensive use of properties in his truthmakers. For some contingent predication $<a$ is $F>$, where F is a sparse property belonging to the individual a, its truthmaker is a state of affairs, an entity non-mereologically composed by a and the universal F (Armstrong 1997). Hence, the property F plays a crucial truthmaking role for Armstrong. But at no point does Armstrong resort to a truthmaking property *truth*. The truthmaker for $<a$ is $F>$ is a state of affairs including F; *truth* has no role to play. So $<a$ is $F>$'s truth is indeed accounted for by a sparse property, but not a sparse property of truth. In other words, $<a$ is $F>$ is true in virtue not of $<a$ is $F>$ having *truth*, but in virtue of a having F.

Hence, properties in the form of universals, tropes, and natural classes have played a crucial role in truthmaker theory. What has played no role is a property of truth. To suppose that there is an "alethically potent" sparse property *truth* introduces a number of metaphysical problems. For one, a sparse property *truth* would make truthmaking too easy. If truth-bearers are true in virtue of their possession of *truth*, then their more familiar truthmakers are ontologically unnecessary. Consider <There are Sichuanese tigers>, and suppose its truthmaker is the state of affairs composed by it and the sparse property *truth*. The existence of this state of affairs guarantees that the truth-bearer is true. Given the truth-bearer and *truth*, then, we don't need to suppose the existence of any Sichuanese tigers in order to make <There are Sichuanese tigers> true. All we need is the truth-bearer and *truth*. Thus, a metaphysically potent property of truth would render all other ontological posits extraneous; all truths are grounded by the truths themselves, taken together with *truth*. No other objects are required.

[4] Interestingly, staunch defender of correspondence Marian David agrees with the metaphysical deflationist on this point (2005: 149).

[5] See Asay 2013b, 2014, and 2018a.

Such a view, I take it, is outrageous. Of course, <There are Sichuanese tigers> can't possess *truth* unless Sichuanese tigers exist. But what this observation reveals is that the possession of *truth* is not the more fundamental matter here. The tigers come first, ontologically speaking, and they account for the truth of <There are Sichuanese tigers> all by themselves. Hence, the tigers themselves perform the necessary truthmaking duty. *Truth* has no role to play here, and that is why I conclude that truthmaker theorists have no use for a metaphysically substantive property *truth*. Truthmaker theorists should be metaphysical deflationists about truth.

Jonathan Tallant and David Ingram have argued, however, that there is a role for a sparse property of truth to play in the context of truthmaker theory (2017). They argue from the fact (according to truthmaker theorists) that all truths depend on something for their truth to the claim that truth has a nature to be accounted for. To account for why truths depend, we need to posit a substantive property *truth*. They write:

> We say it's of the *nature* of truths to depend. So a truth property can't do the work by itself, for its nature is such that *it must depend*. Absent something upon which to depend (e.g., something like a worldly fact that unites Sam and *being brave* in the case of <Samwise is brave>), no proposition can instantiate the truth property. This follows simply and straightforwardly from our claim that it's of the nature of truths to depend. By way of analogy, just as the property *being a brother* can't be instantiated in the absence of a sibling, so *being true* can't be instantiated in the absence of something to ground the truth. So, as we have it, Asay's argument against a truth property fails. (2017: 963)

In response, I first note that this argument is available only to maximalists. Tallant and Ingram see maximalism as essential to the truthmaker program, and I have already argued against that contention at length. Second, it seems to me that Tallant and Ingram write as if the very having of a nature is enough to establish that a property is substantive. But all properties have natures in at least some minimal sense, even those universally conceded to be merely abundant. It's of the nature of grue things *qua* grue things not ever to be red. It's of the nature of things within a kilometer of either Cambridge or Shanghai to be within a mile of either Cambridge or Shanghai. Properties, be they abundant or sparse, offer a means of collecting and categorizing objects in some sort of unifying fashion; that's the theoretical role they're introduced to play. Because all properties have a nature in this sense, facts about their natures can't be sufficient grounds for identifying properties as being sparse. Tallant and Ingram's analogy bears this out. Of course, one can't be a brother in the

absence of a sibling. This reflection does not entail that *being a brother* is a universal or perfectly natural class. The relevant ontological commitments involved in committing to <X is a brother> is to X and his sibling, not to a sparse *being a brother*.

Tallant and Ingram argue that the fact that truths depend is a fact in need of explanation, and a fact best explained by positing the existence of a sparse property *truth*. The deflationist – who understands truth talk as fundamentally fulfilling some expressive purpose – hears this argument as follows: Snow can't be white unless something exists (i.e., white snow), and penguins can't exist unless something exists (i.e., penguins), and so forth. Therefore *truth* is sparse. The claim that truth depends on being is an abbreviation for indefinitely many claims about various dependencies. (And as I've argued, it shouldn't be understood in a way that presupposes maximalism.) The metaphysical deflationist sees no explanatory role for *truth* to play here; most of the dependency claims at issue make no reference to truth whatsoever. So I fail to see the explanatory demand that Tallant and Ingram insist upon. If they wish to find a deep explanatory connection between truth and dependence, my suggestion is to look for it between the concepts TRUTH and DEPENDENCE; sparse properties need not play a role.

To sum up, truthmaker theory as I advocate it is neutral regarding whether or not the concept TRUTH is substantive. Truthmaker theory, fundamentally an enterprise in ontology, makes no explanatory demands on the concept of truth. Truthmaking ideas can be articulated in deflationarily acceptable ways, which is to say that "true" is dispensable in truthmaking claims in the same way that it is in non-truthmaking contexts. For instance, instead of saying that <*p*> is made true by T, one can say that it's metaphysically necessary that if T exists, then *p*. Truthmaking itself takes no stance on the substance of TRUTH, which means that deflationists have nothing to fear within the project of truthmaker theory. At the same time, truthmaker theory has no need for a substantive property of truth. Such a property would undermine the familiar ambitions of truthmaker theory, and deeply offend against commonsensical ontological views.

6.2 A Truthmaker Theory of Truth?

So far, I have advocated a strict separation between truth and truthmaking. Others have found it desirable to bring the two closer together. The sort of view I have in mind arose in Section 2.1, in connection with the

explanation-first approach to truthmaking. There, I argued that the explanatory understanding of truthmaking was closely connected to the project of offering a substantive theory of truth, and in particular the correspondence theory of truth. In the next section, I argue that truthmaking can be motivated independently of correspondence theory, and actually presents an undermining challenge to correspondence theory. In this section, I demonstrate why truthmaking cannot be put to work in the theory of truth. Hence, I argue against the views of those who, like Jago (2012b, 2013, 2018), find it desirable to offer an account of truth in terms of truthmaking.

My target in this section is what one might call a "truthmaker theory of truth." Such a theory is an attempt to analyze or define the notion of truth in terms of the notion of truthmaking (e.g., Mumford 2007b: 316). Although truthmaker theorists have tended not to go about explicitly analyzing truth in this way, they have frequently made comments to the effect that they – or those who subscribe to the basic idea of truthmaking – are committed to this kind of perspective on truth. Consider Ross Cameron's remark that "Truthmaker theory is a theory about what it is for a proposition to be true" (2008a: 412; cf. his 2008d: 108), or John O'Leary-Hawthorne and Graham Oppy's suggestion that truthmaker theory offers an account of the "hidden essence" of truth (1997: 175–176).[6] Many have also floated the idea that by defending truthmaking, one is thereby defending some kind of correspondence theory.[7] Remarks such as these are typically not terribly sensitive to the distinction between *truth* and TRUTH. The argument to follow is best thought of as a critique of any conceptual analysis of TRUTH in terms of truthmaking. My contention is that these attempts ultimately run into circularity. As a result, truthmaking is best understood as presupposing the notion of truth, not analyzing it. I then address Jago's specific truthmaker theory of truth, which is sensitive to the concept/property distinction and applies to *truth* alone.

The first point to stress is that a truthmaker theory of truth would need to be maximalist. If truth is to be defined in terms of truthmaking, then, at a minimum, any truth-bearer $<p>$ is true only if $<p>$ has a truthmaker.[8]

[6] See also Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006a: 263. [7] See again the references in footnote 14 of Chapter 2.

[8] But consider Jago's presentation of nonmaximalism, which maintains that something could be true either in virtue of having a truthmaker, or in virtue of not having a truthmaker (2012b: 908). The circularity argument below will apply to this view as well, for the notion of an absence of truthmaking also presupposes truth.

A truthmaker theory of truth is simply not in the cards for anyone who adopts a nonmaximalist perspective, as I have. According to such views, there can be truth without benefit of truthmaking, and so the idea of defining the former in terms of the latter is a nonstarter (cf. Smith and Simon 2007).[9]

But what about those who embrace maximalism? As Jago stresses, one proposed benefit of adopting maximalism is that one can then use it to give a substantive account of truth (2012b: 904, 2013: 461). However, I contend that even maximalists cannot put truthmaking to work in their theory of truth. The problem is that the notion of truthmaking itself is best understood in terms of truth, and so any attempt to define truth in terms of truthmaking is circular (Merricks 2007: 15, David 2009: 144, Schulte 2011: 420).

There are several accounts in the literature regarding the nature of the truthmaking relation. All of them employ an antecedent notion of truth. For most, truthmaking requires necessitation: x is a truthmaker for y only if it is metaphysically necessary that if x exists, then y is *true*. (On my view, necessitation is also sufficient for truthmaking.) Hence, the necessitation condition already employs the notion of truth. Other approaches share this same feature. On Lowe's "essential dependence" account, truthmakers are objects that are essentially related to truth-bearers such that those truth-bearers are *true* if those objects exist (2007, 2009). According to Schaffer, truthmakers are objects that provide grounds for the *truth* of truth-bearers (2010). Any other analysis 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 (such as their existence or believability). 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.

The only theoretical option that avoids circularity is to take truthmaking as a primitive relation, and subsequently define truth in terms of it. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005) takes truthmaking to be a primitive notion (though he cannot go on to define truth in terms of it, since he is not a maximalist). While this position is impossible to refute, it remains to be seen what the motivation is for taking *truthmaking* to be a more basic and

[9] Mulligan (2007: 53) claims that nonmaximalists "regularly" define truth in terms of truthmaking anyway, though he offers no citations. Perhaps he has in mind his own seminal paper (Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984) that presents truthmaking as being a modern correspondence theory while also defending nonmaximalism.

more fundamental notion than *truth*. It's far more plausible, it seems to me, to take truth (a seemingly more basic and familiar notion) as primitive, and define truthmaking in terms of it; this is the approach I defend (in Asay 2013b). Even Rodriguez-Pereyra offers a gloss on the primitive truthmaking relation that appeals to truth, claiming that truthmakers are the objects in virtue of which truth-bearers are *true* (2005: 18; cf. Meinertsen 2018: 28). Defending primitivism about some notion involves showcasing the many theoretical fruits that follow from it, as compared to other choices of primitives. The maximalist-cum-primitivist about truthmaking needs to show what those fruits are, if we are to take seriously the idea that truth is best defined in terms of a primitive notion of truthmaking. In particular, truthmaking primitivists must show that their overall view is superior to that of those who take truth to be the more fundamental notion.

Setting aside the primitivist retreat, it appears that the attempt to define truth in terms of truthmaking runs straight into circularity. But perhaps the circularity objection can be resisted another way. It might be thought that the appearance of truth in the above accounts of the truthmaking relation is innocuous, and that it can be dispensed with by utilizing familiar maneuvers from the deflationist's toolkit. For deflationary theories of truth, "true" is primarily a logical device useful for expressing generalizations (among other things), but is ultimately dispensable. So we might hold that we *can* give an account of the truthmaking relation that relies on "true" only as a device for generalization, and that hence can emerge truth-free.[10] If so, we can use the notion of truthmaking to define truth without fear of circularity, despite initial appearances.

This deflationist-inspired response, however, is not available to those who seek to use truthmaker theory for revealing the nature of truth. Consider first a truthmaker theory of truth that presupposes the necessitation condition on truthmaking:

(T_1) 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.

"True" now appears in the *definiens*, which is the source of the circularity worry. The current thought is that by noticing the way that "is true" is normally redundant, we may turn (T_1) into:

[10] For the generalizing role of "true" in truthmaker theory, see Fox 1987: 189, Bigelow 1988: 125–127 and 2009: 396–397, Lewis 2001a: 278 and 2001b: 603–604, and Künne 2003: 164.

(T_2) For all *y*, *y* is true only if there exists some *x* such that it is metaphysically necessary that if *x* exists, then *y*.

(T_2) avoids (T_1)'s use of "true" at the fatal cost of unintelligibility. The quantifier accompanying "*x*" is the ordinary objectual quantifier. If we also quantify over "*y*" objectually – substituting it with names for truth-bearers like sentences, beliefs, and propositions – then the final substitution will fail. We would have the following bit of nonsense as an instance:

> "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true only if there exists some *x* such that it is metaphysically necessary that if *x* exists, then "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only."

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

> "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true only if there exists some *x* such that it is metaphysically necessary that if *x* exists, then lesser pandas are lesser in name only.

In order to derive theorems like this, we need to trade (T_2) for:

(T_3) For all *y*, "*y*" is true only if there exists some *x* such that it is metaphysically necessary that if *x* exists, then *y*.

To interpret (T_3), 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 particularly substitutionally quantified sentence "Σx (. . .*x*. . .)" is true if and only 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 "Πx(. . .*x*. . .)" 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 a circular definition of truth. Thus, in order to rely on

(T_3) 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.[11]

Perhaps the answer for the truthmaker theorist seeking to analyze truth in terms of truthmaking lies not in substitutional quantification, but 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 nonparadoxical instances of the propositional truth schema. Perhaps we can do the same for (T_1). Even if we cannot adequately remove "is true" from (T_1), we can take its instances, pair them with the T-sentences, and derive the needed theorems such as:

> "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true only if there exists some x such that it is metaphysically necessary that if x exists, then lesser pandas are lesser in name only.

Here we have one of the infinitely many needed noncircular theorems of the truthmaker theory of truth. One could point to this conditional 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 infinitary view "(T_4)."

(T_4) faces three major difficulties. First, anyone who advocates it relinquishes the ability to give a finitely statable theory of truth, a common desideratum for nondeflationary theories of truth. 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.[12] Substantive theories of truth, however, hold that there are important commonalities between truths,

[11] Christopher Hill (2002) has attempted such a project (though his interests are disconnected from truthmaking), which aims to offer an inferentialist treatment of substitutional quantification. This is not the place to evaluate Hill's proposal, but one may wonder whether the notion of inference admits of a full elucidation without relying on truth (see Asay 2013b: 209–211). Alternatively, one might respond by rejecting the semantics for the substitutional quantifiers given here, and taking them instead as logical primitives. This maneuver does sidestep the circularity worry, but invokes a theoretical primitive that requires further theoretical justification. It's unclear what could motivate taking on this additional primitive, given that the advocate of (T_3) doesn't get to say anything above and beyond what a deflationist who accepts truthmaker theory can say.

[12] Which is not to say that all deflationists are happy with the infinite approach. See Hill 2002 and Künne 2003.

and thus the absence of an explicit, general statement of what truth consists of is a serious shortcoming.[13]

Secondly, (T_4) exhibits a kind of motivational incoherence. Anyone who takes the conditional above and its infinitely many cousins to constitute a theory of *truth* is advocating a union between antideflationist 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 (T_1) 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 the consequent of the conditional. But the second appearance of "true" is treated as a mere logical device that is in principle dispensable.[14]

Finally, (T_4) stands in a problematic relationship to the T-sentences. We arrive at its instances by deriving them from the circular instances of (T_1) together with their T-sentences. For example, we can pair the following instance of (T_1)

> "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true only if there exists some x such that it is metaphysically necessary that if x exists, then "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true

with the T-sentence

> "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true if and only lesser pandas are lesser in name only

[13] 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 leads 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*. So the thought, common to Horwich's minimalism and (T_4), that truth has to be defined in terms of *everything* does not sit well with substantive theories of truth.

[14] Thanks go to Keith Simmons for discussing this point with me.

in order to derive:

> "Lesser pandas are lesser in name only" is true only if there exists some x such that it is metaphysically necessary that if x exists, then lesser pandas are lesser in name only.

To arrive at (T_4), then, we need to employ the T-sentences. Now, (T_4) cannot take the T-sentences to be the explanatorily basic facts about truth – that would be to concede deflationism – but neither can the advocate of (T_4) take them to be explained by (T_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 "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. (T_4)'s relationship to the T-sentences, however, compromises the purpose of Convention T. (T_4) must be front-loaded with the T-sentences in order to derive its theorems, and so the convention provides no meaningful constraint on it. (T_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 nondeflationary 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. (T_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.

All told, I conclude that the familiar deflationary tactics I have explored cannot be used to allow truthmaker theorists to offer a noncircular truthmaker-based theory of TRUTH. All that those strategies show is that deflationists may accept instances of truthmaking; what the tactics cannot be used for is revealing any underlying essence to the nature of truth in terms of truthmakers. The right view is that the notion of truthmaking presupposes the notion of truth. Truth comes first, conceptually speaking, and it informs our notion of truthmaking. Equipped with the notion of truth, we can contemplate what the ontological grounds (if any) are for any particular truth. But there is no contemplation of truthmaking without a prior understanding and respect for truth itself.

The circularity argument most naturally applies to attempts at defining TRUTH in terms of TRUTHMAKING. Mark Jago's truthmaker theory of truth, by contrast, analyzes the property *truth* in terms of *truthmaking*. In fact, he identifies the properties *being true* and *having a truthmaker*

(2018: 74). He recognizes that offering a conceptual analysis of TRUTH in terms of truthmaking would land him in circularity (2018: 1), and also that his property identification relies on maximalism (2018: 78). I have claimed that even maximalists cannot analyze truth in terms of truthmaking. Does this charge still stick to Jago's analysis of *truth* in terms of *truthmaking*?

Jago's thesis is that the property of truth is numerically identical to the property of having a truthmaker. So the claim is not just that the two properties are necessarily coextensive (for that's just maximalism). Jago writes: "We can think of this property in terms of existential quantification into the first argument-place of the *truthmaking* relation . . . It's the property $\lambda x \exists y$(*y truthmakes x*)" (2018: 74). Jago calls this property "existential": "it is the property *there is an x such that x truthmakes* —. A proposition has this property when it fills the '—' gap" (2018: 1). The explication of *truth* by way of *truthmaking* might suggest some sort of asymmetrical priority: what it is to be true is to have a truthmaker, where the notion of truthmaking is more fundamental than truth. But given that we are working with an identity claim here, the explication should equally run in reverse. What is it to have a truthmaker? That's just to be true.

My first objection to Jago's view is that it isn't a truthmaker theory of truth, in the common sense of the term. It can't be, precisely because it identifies being true and having a truthmaker. An implication of Jago's identification is that it's not the case that propositions are true because they have a truthmaker. That would be an explanatory circularity: a proposition has some property because it has that property. Consider the matter this way. The propositions <Hong Kong is hilly> and <Singapore is humid> both share the property *T*. That property is referred to in various ways: we can call it "truth" or "having a truthmaker." However we refer to it, it's just one property. The propositions just have *T*; they don't have *T* because they have *T*. (At least, not in any metaphysically perspicuous sense.) But I take it that Jago is committed to the claim that propositions are true because they have truthmakers, and in a metaphysically perspicuous sense. A truthmaker theory of truth (the thing I'm arguing against) needs truthmaking to be more basic than truth; Jago's identity abandons that.

Jago offers his identification as something that opposes the deflationary perspective on *truth*. My second objection is that the view either begs the question against metaphysical deflationism, or is compatible with it. Either way, he hasn't successfully established a substantive truthmaker theory of

truth. To know which horn of the dilemma obtains, we need to know more about how Jago (as well as individual deflationists) understand the nature of properties. As already noted, the word "property" is employed in metaphysical contexts in inconsistent ways. To understand what it is to be a deflationist about the property of truth, we need some further theoretical apparatus; that's why I incorporate the sparse/abundant distinction as a way to provide content to the deflationary stance on *truth*. When deflationism is characterized as there being no "robust or substantive" property of truth (e.g., Blackburn 1998: 75) or no property of truth at all (e.g., Kirkham 1992: 307), the best way to interpret the remark is as the claim that truth is merely an abundant property: there is no sparse property of truth.

By this criterion, Armstrong is a clear metaphysical deflationist: he thinks that truth is an internal property, and truthmaking an internal relation. These properties and relations do not correspond to universals, and so are abundant (2004: 9; see also David 2005). They are no addition of being above and beyond the truths and truthmakers themselves. What's unclear to me is how Jago's identification requires one to abandon this perspective. That *being true* and *having a truthmaker* are the same might, for all I can gather, be acceptable to any maximalist. A maximalist agrees that the two are necessarily coextensive; is the further step of identifying two abundant properties a concession to metaphysical deflationism? No: to identify one merely abundant property with another is not to admit that they are actually sparse. (By that logic, all abundant properties would be sparse since they are identical with themselves.) Moreover, on some views of properties, necessary coextension is a perfectly acceptable ground for identity, especially when merely abundant properties are at stake (e.g., Lewis 1983).

If Jago's claims about *being true* are read in the context of it being a merely abundant property, then the metaphysical deflationist need not take issue with them. When Jago proposes his identification, however, he does so against the backdrop of having already defended *being true* as a substantive property. So presumably he takes *being true* (and so *having a truthmaker*) as sparse. The problem here is that Jago's critique of deflationism is best directed at conceptual deflationism. That critique centers on deflationists' difficulty with identifying propositions independently of truth, and formulating their theory in a way that avoids the semantic paradoxes. These are fair concerns, but they don't especially implicate the mere abundance of *truth*.

Jago's first objection to deflationism identifies a vicious circularity. The deflationist's theory is given by way of the T-propositions, such as

<<Snow is white> is true if and only if snow is white>. These propositions are the ones necessary for defining what property *truth* is. Yet these propositions themselves contain *truth* (or a mode of presentation of *truth*, in the case of Fregean propositions) as a part. In effect, the T-propositions are supposed to tell us what *truth* is, but we don't know what the T-propositions are independently of knowing what *truth* is. The second objection is that deflationism cannot even be articulated without antecedently solving the semantic paradoxes. (I push this same objection in Asay 2013b: 315–316.) *Truth* is defined by the T-biconditionals, but which ones? There are inconsistent T-biconditionals (e.g., "L is true if and only if L is not true," where L is "L is not true"), so these must be quarantined in some non-ad hoc way if we are to understand what property *truth* is.

As criticisms of the deflationist's attempt to analyze or define "true" or TRUTH, Jago's objections are on target. But I don't see them as having much to do with the issue as to whether or not there is an alethically potent property *truth*. Deflationists say precious little about what they mean when they admit that truth is a property.[15] Here is Horwich, right after admitting that truth is a property: "'is true' is a perfectly good English predicate – and (leaving aside nominalistic concerns about the very notion of 'property') one might well take this to be a conclusive criterion for standing for a property of *some* sort" (1998: 37). Horwich gives us nothing to work with regarding how he understands the ontology of properties. So I wouldn't go as far as Jago does in taking Horwich to be committed to taking "truth to be an entity of some kind" (2018: 30).

My takeaway is that Jago has lodged important objections against deflationism about TRUTH, but then takes that to be a defense of substantivism about *truth*. This then allows him to defend his positive view about *truth* as a substantivist view. The metaphysical deflationist, however, can charge Jago with begging the question whenever his subsequent arguments presuppose that there is a substantive property of *truth*. Maybe there is, but Jago's criticism of deflationism doesn't support that claim. Furthermore, it's unclear what use Jago has of a metaphysically potent *truth* anyway. (Recall, not even Armstrong has a purpose for it.) Jago employs an ontology of states of affairs to serve as truthmakers. The truthmaker for <Bertie is snuffling> is a state of affairs of Bertie's snuffling, not any state of affairs involving *truth*. The point of positing a metaphysically potent property of truth is to play an indispensable metaphysical role (such as accounting for causation, resemblance, or truthmaking), and as

[15] See Edwards (2018: chapter 1) for a thorough discussion of this issue.

I've argued, truthmaker theorists (Jago included) accomplish that work with entities that do that job just fine without a further substantive property *truth*.[16]

6.3 Truthmaking and Correspondence

In the course of defending the ontology-first perspective on truthmaking over the explanation-first perspective in Chapter 2, I argued that truthmaker theory and the correspondence theory of truth share a motivational basis. They both seek to capture and explain the idea that truth depends on reality. Here, for example, is Joshua Rasmussen: "A principal motivation for the correspondence theory is the feeling that truths should be grounded in (or made true by) the existence of things in the world" (2014: 135). Hence, many have seen truthmaker theory to be a means of vindicating correspondence theory (Armstrong 2004: 16, Rami 2009: 2), reviving it (Read 2000: 67), or sanitizing it (Oliver 1996: 69). In the previous section, I argued that truthmaker theory cannot *be* the correspondence theory, since the former cannot be a theory of truth at all, and so *a fortiori* cannot be the correspondence theory of truth. Truthmaking presupposes truth. Perhaps, then, one can accept the arguments of the previous section, but maintain nevertheless that the kind of truth that truthmaker theory should presuppose is the correspondence kind. That view is what I dispute in this section. Truthmaking motivates a *rejection* of correspondence theory, not its vindication.

I do not wish to overplay my hand. There is no single correspondence theory of truth, and by no means do I aim to refute all such theories. My goal, rather, is to show that truthmaking advocates need not ally themselves with correspondence; in fact, they have independent grounds to resist. The path of merging correspondence and truthmaking is well traveled; I want to vividly demonstrate the advantages of pairing truthmaking with noncorrespondence attitudes about truth, and so I offer here the reasons that truthmaker theorists can give against correspondence-style theories of truth.

The first argument against correspondence starts with my rejection of maximalism. Maximalism about truthmaking does not entail any kind of

[16] Jago does deploy alethic states of affairs (i.e., states of affairs that involve *truth* as a component) in his account of how grounding and truthmaking relate (2018: chapter 6). One way of pressing back against my critique would be to show that *grounding* requires us to posit a substantive property of truth, even if truthmaking doesn't.

commitment to correspondence. For instance, one could be a deflationist about truth, and yet maintain that all truths have truthmakers. Such a view can be found, for instance, in David Lewis (2001a, Lewis and Rosen 2003).[17] But commitment to correspondence would seem to entail commitment to maximalism. If to be true is to stand in the correspondence relation to an appropriate sort of entity, then presumably that entity is also fit to play a truthmaking role. According to correspondence theories, all truths must stand in the correspondence relation to something, and so presumably all truths will end up with truthmakers.[18] Arguments against maximalism – of the kind I offered in Chapter 4 – are therefore arguments against correspondence theory so construed.

The case against correspondence can also be found by attending to its close similarity to truthmaking. Precisely because of those similarities, truthmaker theorists have reason to reject correspondence theories of truth. As I shall argue, 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 instead.

What is the attraction of correspondence? Rasmussen opens his book-length defense of correspondence theory by writing: "The correspondence theory is motivated by the idea that truth is connected in some way to some reality" (2014: 6). Later, he identifies as motivations for correspondence "the conviction that truth consists in a link with reality" and the idea "that what is true should be linked to what exists" (2014: 43–44). Then he writes that "One motivation for the correspondence theory is the conviction that reality determines what's true" (2014: 51). Save for the question-begging ring of the supposed conviction that truth *consists* in a link with reality, these motivations that Rasmussen identifies over and over again are exactly the motivations cited in paradigm discussions of truthmaking – and this volume is no exception. If Rasmussen is correct as to what really drives the case for correspondence, then we can appreciate that truthmaker theory and correspondence theory spring from the same source.

[17] MacBride (2013) and Edwards (2018) object to such a combination. I tackle their views in the next section.

[18] Rasmussen (2014: 43–44) notes that E. J. Lowe suggested to him in conversation that a correspondence theorist might take negative truths to be true in virtue of being the negation of a proposition that fails to correspond to anything. On this view, some truths do not correspond to anything. So one could resist my argument by adopting such a view, which is rejected by Rasmussen himself and most others in the literature.

On the view I have laid out so far, there are two separate theoretical tasks: accounting for the nature of truth, and accounting for the ontological grounds of truths. We all need a theory of truth, and we all need some account of what makes things true. The traditional, substantive theories of truth have often pursued the first task in terms of the second. That is to say, one way to think of correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories of truth is in terms of how they ground truth, respectively, in worldly facts, coherence relations between propositions, or facts of utility.[19] But in principle the two tasks can be separated. The truthmaker theory I've defended shows how we can explore the ontological grounds for truth without taking on a partisan stance regarding the nature of truth. In so doing, truthmaker theorists account for the connections between truth and reality, which is what Rasmussen identifies as the principal motivation for correspondence theory.

Hence, in order to capture the idea that what is true is intimately connected to reality, we need only go in for truthmaker theory. This enables truthmaker theorists to accept what are in my view more theoretically economical accounts of truth: a metaphysically deflationary account of the nature of the property *truth*, and an either primitivist or deflationary account of the concept TRUTH. Hence, I belong to the well-known camp of philosophers who think that there is something "natural," "default," or "intuitive" about the correspondence theory, though ultimately we need not be correspondence theorists in order to capture it.[20]

The differences between the truthmaker theorist who eschews correspondence in favor of deflationism or primitivism and the correspondence theorist are subtle, but nonetheless real.[21] A first reason to prefer the former is that it can be more ontologically economical than correspondence theory. That is to say, the truthmaker theorist can offer a more parsimonious account than can the correspondence theorist when it comes to explaining their shared commitment to the idea that truth

[19] Marian David (2009) offers reasons why correspondence theorists, from their own perspective, might have grounds for insisting that their commitment to correspondence does not *ipso facto* commit them to truthmaking, since the latter notion need not, strictly speaking, belong to their ideology. That may be so, but I would contend that, nevertheless, the role that facts play in the correspondence theory is a truthmaking role, and so facts function as truthmakers, even if correspondence theorists choose not to understand them in such terms.

[20] See, e.g., Blackburn 1984: 224, Horwich 1990, Grover 1992: 32, Wright 1992, and Hill 2002. Cartwright observes that "we are all inclined toward some form of "correspondence" theory of truth" (1987: 73).

[21] Andrew Thomas (2011) contends that there is no reason to favor one of these views over the other. This section is an answer to his objections.

depends on being. Take, for example, <There are penguins>. The truthmaker theorist should say that this is made true by penguins: penguins themselves are sufficient for satisfying the "correspondence intuition" with respect to the truth that there are penguins. But on any typical correspondence account, for anything one takes to be true there must be some fact (or other relevant slice of reality) in one's ontology to which it corresponds. So to <There are penguins> there must correspond some object – call it "O." If O is something like a fact, then we have ontological overkill. What we need are penguins, not O, to satisfy the correspondence inclination with respect to the truth that there are penguins. But if O is just some penguin, then correspondence theory offers no advance over truthmaker theory. So in the case of many truths, truthmaker theory fares as well as or better than correspondence theory in accounting for how truths are grounded in reality.

Truthmaker theory also scores points for 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? 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. 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 idea while at the same time tackling the problem of universals and accounting for causality.[22] A familiar worry for the correspondence theorist's posits (assuming they go above and beyond the truthmaker theorist's) is that they are ad hoc: they serve no purpose other than their role in correspondence theory.[23] To meet this objection, correspondence theorists must employ entities that can be motivated independently. In so doing, they are likely to arrive at the very sorts of entities that truthmaker theorists already deploy.

[22] For detailed discussion of how truthmaking and the problem of universals do or don't fit together, see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000, 2002a, 2002b, and 2013, MacBride 2002a and 2002b, and Baxter 2018.

[23] E.g., Quine: "facts contribute nothing beyond their specious support of a correspondence theory" (1990: 80).

Truthmaker theory also provides greater theoretical flexibility than correspondence theory when it comes to accounting for traditionally problematic truths. 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 1919b, Barker and Jago 2012), absences (Martin 1996, Kukso 2006), or one giant totality state of affairs (Armstrong 2004) that make it true. But we have seen another (and in my view, better) option: perhaps negative existentials don't have truthmakers at all (Bigelow 1988, Lewis 2001b). Truthmaker maximalism is not a *sine qua non* of truthmaker theory. But if correspondence theory is the correct theory of truth, then every truth *must* have a corresponding object (save for the nonstandard option that Lowe considers). Hence, correspondence theorists' options are more restricted than are truthmaker theorists' when it comes to managing negative existentials. There is a highly appealing route available to truthmaker theorists that is closed off to virtually all correspondence theorists.

Finally, truthmaker theory avoids the traditional problem facing correspondence theory of giving a satisfactory 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. Correspondence theorists must posit the existence of a similar relation if they are to avoid ontological overload.[24] So the correspondence theorist owes us an account of the correspondence relation that is above and beyond the truthmaking relation (while looking remarkably similar to it). None of this is to suggest that correspondence theorists *can't* offer such a theory. (See again Rasmussen 2014.) Still, better to be a truthmaker theorist and avoid this burden altogether.

Furthermore, the correspondence theorist owes us an account of what sorts of objects can enter into the correspondence relation. If the objects are limited to facts, then, since corresponding objects are understood as that which makes truths true, it seems that such correspondence theorists

[24] Note that David (2009) and Saenz (in press) argue that the correspondence relation and truthmaking relation are different. So if they are correct, the two relations cannot be identified.

must say that *only* facts can make truths true. But consider again the truth that there are penguins; it can be made true by just a simple penguin. If the world is more than a world of facts (a Moorean truth, I dare say), then the rest of the world provides truthmakers for truths, too. If other sorts of objects can stand in the correspondence relation, then it continues to resemble more and more the truthmaking relation, in which any object can (and does) stand. So truthmaker theorists have greater ontological flexibility and resources when satisfying the correspondence intuition.

In sum, correspondence theory *at best* offers no advance over truthmaker theory when accounting for the idea that truth depends on reality. One *can* develop a correspondence theory that looks strikingly similar to a fully developed truthmaker theory (such as Armstrong's). But doing so is not motivated simply by the aim of capturing the dependence of truth on reality, for it adds no benefit above and beyond the benefits of "pure" truthmaker theory, i.e., truthmaker theory that is stripped away from any ambition of giving a theory of truth itself. At worst, correspondence theory offers a bloated ontology and lesser theoretical maneuverability. So the choice is clear, insofar as Rasmussen is correct about the motivations for correspondence theory. Rather than adding facts and a correspondence relation to our ontology, we need to account for the dependence of truth on being via the 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. To the extent that correspondence theory can be developed without these things, it offers no obvious benefit that truthmaker theory cannot claim for itself. "Purified" truthmaker theory, in the manner I have articulated and defended, is the more economical, ontologically flexible, and theoretically desirable means for preserving the motivation behind correspondence theory.

6.4 Truthmaking and Deflationism

Finally we come to truthmaking and deflationism. Earlier, I argued that correspondence theorists offer their theory of truth by way of a view about truthmakers. As a result, many have falsely thought that defending the idea of truthmaking automatically leads to a defense of correspondence theories of truth. Once we recognize the two distinct philosophical tasks, however, we can see how the views can be separated. That such a separation can take place is one of the most useful consequences of the recent development of

deflationary theories of truth. By showing how truth-bearers don't need to be true in virtue of possessing some further, analyzable property, deflationists show how the metaphysical posits of correspondence theory are unnecessary. However, it is then sometimes suggested that deflationism has shown that truths don't carry with them any metaphysical implications at all.[25] This line of thought takes the deflationary attitude too far. To say that truths aren't made true by some alethic property is decidedly not to say that they're not made true by anything. To deny the idea of truthmaking altogether is to deny that truths are true in virtue of reality, in virtue of what there is. No deflationist ought to deny that humble claim. In this section, I argue that truthmaking is actually a useful tool for deflationists, as it allows them to fulfill one of their own self-appointed theoretical tasks: countenancing, in some modest sense, the basic idea behind the correspondence theory of truth.

Thoroughgoing deflationism, recall, involves two separable commitments. As to the property *truth*, the deflationist argues that it is merely abundant. The class of truths do not resemble one another in a way that calls for a sparse property to unite them. Each individual truth is true because of what that truth individually says; there is no common explanation for why truths are true. As to the concept TRUTH, the deflationist denies that it exhibits any explanatorily revealing connections to other concepts, connections that go beyond the expressive functions that the truth predicate manifests. These commitments do not by themselves interfere with truthmaking; in fact, deflationists about truth would be well served by taking on my approach to truthmaking. Although I endorse only the first, metaphysical form of deflationism, my grounds for rejecting the second, conceptual form of deflationism do not arise from my views about truthmaking.

Deflationists may accept truthmaking because nothing in their theories precludes it. According to Horwich's minimalism, for instance, the theory of truth is exhausted by the nonparadoxical instances of the propositional truth schema (i.e., instances of "The proposition that p is true if and only if p"), together with the claim that only propositions are true (1998: 43). That's the extent of the theory. Hence, the view is silent

[25] I frequently encounter this idea in the context of how deflationary theories of truth figure into debates over quasirealism, as in this passage from Matthew Chrisman: "By denying that truth is a robust correspondence relation, the quasi-realist effects a sort of deflationism about the ontological commitments implicit in the indicative mood" (2009: 9). By deflating *truth*, then, one thereby deflates a truth's ontological commitments (i.e., its truthmakers). Cf. Armstrong 2006: 45 and 2010: 63.

regarding whether any particular truth has a truthmaker, or what makes it true. For this reason I see deflationism as rejecting the form that previous theories of truth took: accounting for the nature of truth by way of a theory of truthmaking. Whereas correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories force a metaphysical picture onto the set of truths, deflationism stays *neutral* on the topic. The traditional theories build a metaphysical story about truthmaking directly into their theories. Deflationists offer the suggestion that these metaphysical considerations are best kept separate.

Deflationism, therefore, does not call for a rejection of truthmaking. Consider what such a rejection comes to: the admission that we don't need to properly align our beliefs and our ontological inventories. That sort of ontological irresponsibility is not forced upon someone simply for thinking that the T-sentences exhaust what there is to say about the concept of truth. Some deflationists do aim to adopt a radical rejection of all metaphysical investigation (e.g., Thomasson 2014), but it's not an inevitable result of their deflationism. Given its name, of course, "truthmaking" sounds like it's wrapped up in a substantive way of thinking about truth, that to understand why something is true one must explore what it is in reality that makes it true. But that's just the perspective of the failed explanation-first paradigm; ontology-first truthmaking has no problem seeing the "truth" in "truthmaking" as just another expressive convenience. Deflationists, of all people, should recognize that the concerns of truthmaker theory need not be about *truth* as such; they are about all the things that *truths* are themselves about. To ask what makes <Snow is white> true is to ask what makes snow white. To ask what makes <2 is prime> true is to ask what makes 2 prime.[26] The real concern of truthmaker theory (i.e., ontological accountability) does not presuppose a substantive theory of truth.[27]

Fraser MacBride has argued otherwise. He believes that truthmaking in the hands of deflationism is no more than "a motley of claims that aren't compelling" (2013: 691). In MacBride's view, what you sign up for when you sign up for maximalism is different depending on whether or not you're a deflationist. MacBride follows Lewis (2001a, 2001b) in claiming that, for deflationists, maximalism is just a conjunction of the infinitely

[26] Thanks go to John Roberts who first articulated this aspect of my view.

[27] It seems to me, then, that many who have announced a tension between truthmaking and deflationism (e.g., McGrath 2003 and Vision 2005) have relied upon a false vision of what truthmaker theory can be.

many claims of the form "*p* if and only if there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies that *p*."[28] Then MacBride claims that the instances of this schema are implausible, using the example of a contingent predication. MacBride doesn't think that these instances are implausible for nondeflationists, presumably because of that extra content that nondeflationists commit to when they sign up for maximalism. (MacBride is not clear about what that content is.)

MacBride is guilty of cherry-picking if he uses the example of a contingent predication to reveal the implausibility of *all* truthmaking claims. I can just as easily pick an instance of the schema that is logically undeniable: a penguin exists if and only if there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies that a penguin exists. So all MacBride has revealed is that maximalism is controversial. At best, he has shown that deflationists shouldn't be maximalists, which is exactly what I advocate.

Douglas Edwards (2018) also contends that deflationism and truthmaking are incompatible. He believes that deflationism about truth entails deflationism about reference, and that deflationism about reference entails global deflationism about all metaphysical inquiry. Here I shall address the second of these inferences. Edwards is concerned that deflationists about semantic notions like truth and reference can't distinguish between substantive and deflationary properties (which would render deflationism about truth self-undermining). He thinks this instance of an inability to recognize a genuine metaphysical issue applies across the board to all metaphysics (truthmaking included), but his argument focuses only on the case of properties.

Suppose a deflationist wants to distinguish between substantive and deflationary properties: take *being magnetic* and *being true*, for instance. According to Edwards, the fact that *being magnetic* seems to be a genuine feature of reality (that plays a causal role, grounds scientific explanations, etc.)

> suggests that there is a more substantial relationship of reference between the property and the predicate: the reason the predicate "is magnetic" refers to the property of being magnetic is not because the property is a product of the predicate (or the predicate's extension), it is because of some significant relationship between the property of being magnetic and our thought and talk. (2018: 56)

[28] Matthew Simpson (2016) argues that this claim of MacBride's is problematic.

Here I believe Edwards is illicitly transferring the substance rightly found in a property to the substance to be found in the referential relationship that holds between that property and the word we use to refer to it. (Similarly, the ontological substance accompanying a true claim is due to the claim itself, not to the predication of truth of it.) Edwards's idea is that because we think *being magnetic* is a substantive property, so too should we believe that the relation of reference that holds between "is magnetic" and *being magnetic* is likewise substantive. But that inference is optional, and there are other, less problematic ways of characterizing what makes a property substantive. For if reference is a substantive relation, Edwards's line of thinking would render all properties substantive. Substantivists and deflationists about reference can agree that "is within four kilometers of a Bojangles'" refers to the property of being within four kilometers of a Bojangles', but Edwards, who defends a substantive view of reference, would thereby be saddled with the consequence that this property is just as substantive as *being magnetic*.

The moral to draw is that the right way to distinguish substantive and deflationary properties is not by way of the kind of reference relation in which they stand. Rather, it's by attending to their metaphysical role: which properties help account for genuine resemblances between objects and their causal powers? In other words, we should identify substantive properties with the *sparse* ones, as I have repeatedly advocated. Edwards, too, defends the idea that deflationism and substantivism about truth is best defined in terms of sparse and abundant properties (2013, 2018: chapter 2); he can put that account to work to show how deflationists can happily engage in metaphysics.

Edwards also suspects that deflationists (including mere metaphysical deflationists like myself) cannot account for truthmaking because "they lack the resources to explain either how a particular kind of entity serves as the truth-makers for a certain kind of sentences [*sic*], or how a specific entity serves as the specific truth-maker for a sentence" (2018: 176). I've been supposing that penguins are truthmakers for the sentence "There are penguins," and that full-bore deflationists can agree. But what can deflationists (or primitivists) appeal to in their theories of truth in order to explain this? "The answer is," Edwards bluntly states, "nothing" (2018: 179).

I accept the charge. My view that TRUTH is primitive in no way entails that penguins are truthmakers for the sentences that assert their existence. Furthermore, my defense of the idea that deflationism doesn't undermine truthmaking makes use of Edwards's exact claim: nothing within

deflationism tells you what a truth's truthmaker is. It's silent on the matter. Edwards sees an objection here because he continues to view the role of truthmakers as one of explaining truth, but that is not the role that deflationists should assign to truthmakers. In effect, his claim is an objection to my view only if it begs the question. He sees the dialectic as follows: if you think that truths have truthmakers, you think that those truths are explained by those truthmakers. But that's to commit to there being substantive explanations of truth in terms of truthmaking, which is exactly what deflationism and primitivism deny. My point has been to argue that truth and truthmaking are *separate* investigations; from that perspective, it's not a necessary task of the theory of truth to give a theory of truthmakers (and vice versa). Edwards's protest that the deflationist and primitivist theories don't provide a theory of truthmaking is exactly what one should expect from those perspectives, precisely because they motivate the separation at issue.

Now, it would be a problem for the deflationist if something about deflationism somehow precluded our ability to judge that, say, penguins are truthmakers for "There are penguins." But why think that is the case? On the view I have defended, truthmaking is a matter of metaphysical necessitation. One way of knowing which objects are truthmakers for which truths is by probing our modal knowledge (in conjunction with the metaphysical argumentation that occurs throughout this book). The basis for my claim that penguins make "There are penguins" true is that it's metaphysically necessary for the sentence, given what it means, to be true if penguins exist. That is to say, it's metaphysically necessary that if a penguin exists, then there are penguins (because "There are penguins" means that there are penguins). I take it that such knowledge is grounded in my understanding of what penguins are, and what the sentence means. What Edwards hasn't shown is that such modal and semantic knowledge is available only after taking on a substantive theory of truth.[29]

Deflationists can embrace truthmaker theory. But in so doing, they need not concede that their truthmaker theory also reveals the nature of truth. Rather, they are simply subscribing to the kind of ontological accountability that I have articulated so far. Furthermore, deflationists should be truthmaker theorists. Everyone needs to pursue ontological accountability, and I've just argued that deflationism by itself doesn't

[29] A better argument against deflationism is that it can't account for the crucial connection between truth and *meaning*, a connection which I have helped myself to (see Bar-On, Horisk, and Lycan 2000). But then the problem is the deflationist's failure to account for meaning, not truthmaking.

provide it. Substantivists who define truth via truthmaking achieve their ontological accountability by means of their theory of truth, but deflationists must look elsewhere. Fortunately deflationism is no roadblock on the way to ontological honesty.[30]

Deflationists and other critics of correspondence have long supposed that the correspondence theory taps into something correct.[31] As I argued in the last section, the correspondence theory is correct to claim that truth depends on being, but wrong to ratchet that thought up into a full-blown theory of truth. My suggestion to deflationists is to embrace truthmaker theory as a way of vindicating their claim that though the correspondence *theory* is incorrect, the correspondence *idea* is in good hands.

I imagine many deflationists would not accept this offering, as they would insist that deflationism by itself already captures the correspondence idea via the T-sentences.[32] For example, the T-sentence "<Vic and Russ went to the park> is true if and only if Vic and Russ went to the park" shows that the truth of the proposition corresponds to something in the world, namely, Vic and Russ going to the park. But the T-sentence does no such thing. To assume that "Vic and Russ went to the park" is engaging the world is to bring to the sentence an antecedent conception of what makes it true. Consider a T-sentence for a mathematical truth: "<2 is prime> is true if and only if 2 is prime." This T-sentence doesn't settle the question of mathematical realism; it doesn't answer the longstanding question as to whether mathematical entities belong to the world.[33] All this is to say that committing to a bunch of truths (which is what committing to T-sentences and their components involves) doesn't force views about one's ontological commitments until one has furnished a view that connects what one takes to be true with what one takes to exist. And that is to offer a theory of truthmaking.

One other attempt at showing that deflationism undermines substantive investigation into truthmakers is Tallant's "explanationist" alterative (2018: chapter 7). Tallant argues that deflationary theories offer the resources for explaining the truth of propositions, and so there is no work

[30] A related issue has been taken up in the literature, namely, whether deflationists can maintain that truth depends on being, but not vice versa (e.g., Vision 2010, Caputo 2013, MacBride 2014, Liggins 2016, and Dodd 2018). I, predictably, think they can, but not *qua* deflationists: they must employ truthmaking to do so.

[31] See again the references in footnote 20.

[32] See Popper 1963: 223–228, Quine 1970: 10–11 and 1990: 81, Vision 2003, Horwich 2008, Young 2009, and Tallant 2018: 154–155. I discuss this issue further at Asay 2013b: 129–137.

[33] I take this topic up in Chapter 11.

left for truthmaker theory to perform. Tallant's view about truthmaking (against which he forcefully argues) firmly upholds the "explanation-first" account of truthmaking that I sought to undermine in Section 2.1, precisely so as to inoculate truthmaker theory from the kinds of objections Tallant launches. The view is straightforward. The explanandum of any given truthmaker explanation is "<*p*> is true." That is to say, this should be the conclusion of an explanation-offering deductive argument. For any such case, "*p*" may be taken as a premise in the argument, since "*p*" of course is true if "<*p*> is true" is. A second available premise is just the relevant instance of the T-schema: "<*p*> is true if and only if *p*." Taken together, these premises entail "<*p*> is true," which was to be explained. Thus, nothing more than deflationism and its austere commitment to the T-schema are required to explain the truth of propositions.

Tallant's view is an elaboration of the deflationary truthmaking tactic I challenged in Section 5.3. There, the idea was that the B-schema "<*p*> is true because *p*" is all one needs to give a theory of "truthmaking." Perhaps that would be the case if the goal of truthmaker theory was to give an explanation – any explanation, however trivial and uninformative – but that's the incorrect view to take of the truthmaking enterprise. Tallant's explanations offer no ontological elucidation, they answer no ontological queries, and so do not further the goal of ontological accountability. Furthermore, his explanatory scheme only covers a limited number of truths. They seek explanations only for semantically ascended claims; but that was never the goal of truthmaker theory. Tallant, like other truthmaking deflationists, hears the claim *that truthmaker theorists seek to account or explain the truth of truth-bearers* as an explanatory project involving only semantically ascended claims, i.e., the ones that explicitly attribute truth to truth-bearers.[34] But those sensitive to deflationism about *truth* ought to be more cautious with respect to expressions like "the truth of truth-bearers." That expression can just serve as an abbreviation for the infinitely many truths: the truth of truth-bearers is just snow being white, grass being green, Obama existing, and the like. We might be able to explain "<*p*> is true" by reference to "*p*" and the T-schema, but the question will remain as to what sort of ontological commitments ought to accompany a commitment to "*p*" being true; that question is the one that deflationism about truth is silent on, and the one that is the focus of truthmaker theory.

There is no escape from truthmaking, so long as we uphold ontological accountability. Once we establish the separation between the task of

[34] Fine (2012: 43) makes this same mistake.

understanding the nature of truth, and the task of understanding the ontological grounds for truth, any hint of a tension between truthmaking and deflationism evaporates. Deflationists should welcome this result. For one thing, deflationists should expect that their theories – precisely because of how thin and austere they are – shouldn't settle complex questions like what exists, which is the leading question of truthmaker theory. Truthmaking is not some branch of esoteric metaphysics, practiced in isolation from other modes of philosophical and empirical inquiry (*contra* Thomasson 2014: 203). Its commitments, therefore, are not anathema to the sensible metaphysics that deflationists should aim to accept.

CHAPTER 7

Analyticity

A familiar gloss on the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is that while the former are true solely in virtue of meaning, the latter are true *also* in virtue of the way of the world. Quinean (1951) skepticism over the analytic/synthetic distinction has cast a long shadow, and many are convinced that the distinction is untenable. I suspect, however, that something close to the familiar gloss is correct. Specifically, I argue in this chapter that truthmaker theory offers a compelling account of the distinction that preserves the basic ideas behind it. Hence, just as clear thinking about truthmaking can lead to a superior understanding of the nature of truth, it can also lead to a superior understanding of the nature of analyticity.[1]

My thesis is that we can formulate an analytic/synthetic distinction in terms of the distinction between truths that require no ontological accounting whatsoever versus those that do. Given the view about the truthmaking relation that I defended in Chapter 3, I am committed to the claim that because analytic truths are necessary, they are trivially made true by everything. The ontological accounting required for analytic truths is trivial – any set of books will suffice. What distinguishes the synthetic truths is that they require some form of substantive ontological accounting. For those who defend a more robust account of the truthmaking relation (which doesn't entail that all necessary truths are trivially made true), to say that analytic truths require no ontological accounting is consistent with maintaining that they are truthmaker gaps. Either way, my view is that analytic truths require no nontrivial ontological accounting. They are as ontologically indifferent as anything can be.[2]

[1] Material in this chapter is largely taken from Asay (in press c).

[2] The suggestion that analyticities are truthmaker gaps has arisen before, though it has been asserted rather than argued for. See, e.g., Simons 2000b: 24, Beebee and Dodd 2005: 2, Rodriguez-Pereyra

I begin by rejecting one account – Armstrong's – of what the truthmakers for analyticities are. Understanding why this view fails will reveal some of the key insights that drive my positive view, which I articulate in Section 7.2. I then turn to some of the most influential criticisms of my sort of account that have been offered by Quine, Harman, and Boghossian. I show why their objections are misplaced, and then conclude by considering some of the positive consequences of my account.

Before I begin, let me make one preliminary, methodological point. My goal is to vindicate a particular distinction in the class of truths whose tenability many have doubted for decades. In vindicating the distinction, I take myself to be providing the resources for explaining a real difference between lots of cases that have been considered paradigm examples of analytic or synthetic truths; I rely on such truths in my examples. For example, I take <Bachelors are unmarried> to be a paradigm case of analyticity, and go on to present my theory of what its analyticity consists in. Analyticity skeptics must show why my account fails to adequately distinguish, for example, <Bachelors are unmarried> from <Phil is a bachelor>. What I do not suppose is that there is some predefined class of analytic truths, all of which must be shown to be analytic by the lights of my account. To the contrary, I believe that there could be lots of cases where reasonable theoreticians might disagree: "spoils to the victor" for such cases, as Armstrong says. I do think that there is a genuine notion of analyticity that philosophers for centuries have been exploring under one guise or another, and that there are clear and less clear cases of it. I take myself to be giving a theory of that notion, one which correctly categorizes many paradigm instances of it while avoiding the standard objections to it.

Let me be clear that I am advancing two theses in this chapter. First is a claim about the ontological grounds for a familiar set of truths typically associated with analyticity: they have none. Second is a claim about the nature of analyticity: what it is to be analytic is to require no ontological grounds. The first thesis is a contribution to ontology; the second to conceptual analysis. My contention in this book is that truthmaker theory can contribute to both enterprises. But even if one doubts the adequacy of my account of analyticity (by showing that it fails to capture the right extension of truths, say), that is not in and of itself a reason to doubt my claim about the ontological vacuity of analytic truths.

2005, Schulte 2011: 428, and Saenz 2014. Ingthorsson (2006: 66) claims that it is "generally regarded" that analyticities are truthmaker gaps. Tałasiewicz et al., on the other hand, regard this view as "extreme" (2013: 593, n. 2).

7.1 A Flawed Account

There is one natural, but ultimately flawed, suggestion as to what might make analytic truths true. David Armstrong suggests that analytic truths are made true by their *meanings*, and, relatedly, that conceptual truths are made true by their constituent *concepts* (2004: 109–110; cf. Heathcote 2018). In fact, those who subscribe to the idea that analyticities are true in virtue of meaning may well have in mind the idea that analytic truths are made true by what they mean.[3]

To defeat this proposal, I need to make two points. First, the proposal reveals that careful attention to truth-bearers is crucial. Let's suppose a basic framework in which sentences express propositions, which are what give those sentences their meaning. In that case, in saying that an analytic truth is made true by its meaning one must be supposing that the truth in question is a sentence, not a proposition. For propositions on this view *are* meanings, not things that have meanings. As a result, if anything is made true by meanings, it's analytic sentences, not propositions. And it does seem plausible that, at least in some sense, analytic sentences – i.e., sentences that express analytic propositions – are made true by their meanings. After all, if we want to explain the truth of the *sentence* "Bachelors are unmarried," we need to do so by way of the fact that it expresses the thought that bachelors are unmarried. If "Bachelors are unmarried" meant instead that unicorns run rampant in Uig, then the sentence wouldn't be true.

Of course, this feature of being true in virtue of meaning applies to *all* sentences; that's why it's usually claimed that synthetic sentences are true in virtue of *both* meaning and the world. Hence, in general, it seems to me a *prima facie* plausible principle that:

> For any true sentence S, if S means that p, then S is made true by whatever makes $<p>$ true together with whatever makes it true that S means that p.

For example, suppose S is "Pangolins exist." Any individual pangolin makes the proposition <Pangolins exist> true. What makes the *sentence* true is any individual pangolin together with whatever makes it true that "Pangolins exist" means that pangolins exist.[4] The sentence meaning what

[3] Simons explores the idea of analyticities being made true by the practices that govern meaning, but remains agnostic as to whether or not those practices "deserve the appellation 'truthmaker'. It is not clear to me that it is harmful to say they do" (2007b: 77). This section is an argument as to why it is "harmful."

[4] This sentence shows that I am using the word "sentence" here in a way that takes sentences' meanings not to be essential to them: as "uninterpreted" sentences, in other words. When it comes

it does together with worldly pangolins provide the proper grounds for "Pangolins exist" to be true.

To put this principle to work in a particular example of a candidate analyticity, distinguish the following:

(S) "Bachelors are unmarried"
(P) <Bachelors are unmarried>
(M) <"Bachelors are unmarried" means that bachelors are unmarried>.

(M) is what you might call, so long as you're appropriately cautious, a "semantic fact," where "fact" here just means "true proposition." (M) is a true proposition concerning the meaning of a particular sentence of English. Don't confuse this kind of semantic fact with the kind of thing that makes (M) true, which you might also call, so long as you're appropriately cautious, a "semantic fact." To avoid confusion, I'll refer to true propositions like (M) as *semantic facts*, and to things that make propositions like (M) true *semantic truthmakers*. We don't need to dig into the unavoidably ontologically contentious issue of what exactly the truthmaker for (M) is; to do so we'd have to take sides on separate issues such as the existence of states of affairs, tropes, nominalism, and the like, and I am not yet prepared to do so. (Such issues come to the fore in the final part of the book.) For now, it's sufficient to note that (M) is a fairly ordinary contingent, empirical truth, and one whose truth is not particularly ontologically suspicious. Its truth ultimately depends upon the linguistic habits and conventions of the community of English speakers, however best those notions are ontologically spelled out.

Call the truthmaker for (M), whatever it turns out to be, "T." The existence of T guarantees that (M) is true. But T isn't relevant at all to (P)'s truth. The social conventions responsible for the meanings of English sentences aren't necessary to make it true that bachelors aren't married. English has nothing to do with it, ontologically speaking. Had English never developed, and T not existed, (P)'s truth would be unaffected; the same holds for every other language that can express (P). Bachelors would be unmarried even if no language were ever developed.

Now, I'm happy to grant that T *is* a truthmaker for (S), and nontrivially so. Without T, there's no accounting for the truth of (S). If T (or any other suitable truthmaker for (M)) didn't exist, leaving (M) false, then there would be no accounting for why (S) is true. It *wouldn't* be true if it didn't

to *interpreted* sentences, the truthmaker for a sentence is the same as the truthmaker for the proposition it expresses.

mean something that was true. Something needs to exist in order for (S) to be true; there must be objects like T around that make sentences meaningful. So it appears that analytic *sentences* do need truthmakers. This is the sense in which all true sentences need truthmakers, since all sentences need to be meaningful in order to be true.[5]

So according to the principle offered above, the truthmaker for (S) is the truthmaker for (P) plus the truthmaker for (M), namely, T. But what is the truthmaker for (P)? My original contention, now suitably refined, is that true analytic *propositions* do not nontrivially have truthmakers, and so (P) has no nontrivial truthmaker. Hence the truthmaker for (S) is identical to the truthmaker for (M). What makes "Bachelors are unmarried" true is whatever it is that makes it true that "Bachelors are unmarried" means that bachelors are unmarried. On this account, everything lines up correctly: possibilities with T are possibilities where "Bachelors are unmarried" means that bachelors are unmarried, and so are possibilities where "Bachelors are unmarried" is true. Nothing else is ontologically required for (S) to be true; once (S)'s meaning is settled, it's true. For (S) to be true, the world needs to be no other way beyond being such that (S) means what it does. Any possibility without T (or anything else suitable to make (M) true) is one where "Bachelors are unmarried" doesn't mean that bachelors are unmarried, and so there is no guarantee that it is true.

Does this analysis vindicate the idea that analytic truths are true in virtue of meaning? Yes and no. Armstrong's claim is that analytic propositions are made true by their meanings (for he takes propositions to be the primary target of truthmaker theory). More specifically, he claims that analytic propositions are made true by the meanings of the words used to express the proposition (2004: 109). My account denies that; at least, it denies that meanings uniquely make true analyticities. In my view, everything (trivially) makes true analyticities. My account does, however, suppose that analytic *sentences* are made true by certain contingently existing semantic truthmakers. But even still, analytic sentences are *not* made true by their meanings: that would be to suggest, falsely, that (S) is made true by (P). (P)'s existence does not guarantee (S)'s truth, for (P) could exist alongside (S) having meant something false. Nor is (S) made true by (M). (M) is a contingently true proposition; its mere

[5] More cautiously (considering that I advocate nonmaximalism): all true sentences *that express propositions that require truthmakers* require a truthmaker. "There are no unicorns" presumably has no truthmaker if <There are no unicorns> doesn't. Still, I'm presuming that something makes it true that "There are no unicorns" means that there are no unicorns, and that thing is relevant to the ontological accounting that is called for in relation to the truth of that sentence.

existence doesn't guarantee the truth of (S). Had (S) meant something else, (M) would have existed but been false, so (M)'s existence does not necessitate the truth of (S). Instead, (S), on my analysis, is made true by the truthmaker for (M). In effect, analytic sentences are made true not by meanings, but by meaning-makers, whereas analytic propositions are not nontrivially made true at all.

My second criticism of Armstrong's account is that by maintaining that conceptual truths are made true by their constituent concepts, it allows contingent objects to serve as nontrivial truthmakers for necessary truths. Like Armstrong, one might think that a conceptual truth like (P) is true in virtue of its constituent concepts, BACHELOR and UNMARRIED. But proper ontological accounting for the truth of (P) does not require that those concepts exist. Bachelors would be unmarried, regardless of whether anyone could conceptualize that thought. Consider other examples. <All red things are colored> would still be true, as would <Rocks are rocks>, even if there never evolved creatures with the capacity for forming concepts. What these counterfactuals reveal is that the ontological accounting for analytic propositions does not require the existence of the concepts that we need to identify and articulate those propositions. Concepts enable us to form thoughts; they do not make those thoughts true. If concepts are understood as contingent existences, things that came into being fairly recently in the Earth's history, then they are not suitable nontrivial truthmakers for necessary truths.[6]

Now, earlier I admitted that the necessarily true (S) is made true by the contingently existing T, so haven't I fallen foul of my own objection? Not if we are careful in our thinking about (S). (S) does indeed express the necessary truth (P). But it's not necessary that (S) is true, since (S) could have expressed something false. The idea of a necessarily true *sentence* is pure magic: how could a set of physical marks, motions, or sounds necessarily end up expressing something true? Those marks, motions, or sounds would somehow have to be essentially meaningful, and that's just supernatural semantics.

[6] Views about concepts that render them necessary existences would indeed avoid this objection, but I find such views ontologically implausible on independent grounds. A related concern is that if propositions are composed by concepts, then propositions themselves must also be treated as contingent existences. Some have argued that necessarily existing propositions are an essential commitment of truthmaker theory (e.g., Merricks 2007), but I have significant doubts that I rehearsed already in Section 1.2. I believe truthmaker theory can be sustained without commitment to propositions at all, but this raises questions ultimately orthogonal to the main issues at hand.

7.2 The Positive Account

So far, I've argued that analytic sentences are made true by "meaning-makers," i.e., something in the neighborhood of linguistic conventions, however understood. This feature is shared by synthetic sentences, though typically they require more. The sentence "Koalas can catch chlamydia" is made true by whatever makes <Koalas can catch chlamydia> true together with whatever makes <"Koalas can catch chlamydia" means that koalas can catch chlamydia> true. The former is not sufficient to guarantee the truth of the sentence, for it does not itself guarantee that the sentence expresses the relevant proposition. So synthetic sentences have more "involved" truthmakers than analytic sentences, since the propositions they express will generally have nonsemantic truthmakers (i.e., objects that have nothing to do with the meanings of words).[7] Based on these observations, the following pattern emerges:

(i) Analytic propositions have no nontrivial truthmakers.
(ii) Analytic sentences have merely semantic truthmakers.
(iii) Synthetic propositions (usually) have nonsemantic truthmakers (when they have truthmakers at all).
(iv) Synthetic sentences, when they have truthmakers, have truthmakers that (usually) are partly semantic and partly nonsemantic.

From these meager resources we have the ability to vindicate the long-derided notions of truth by convention and analyticity. I propose that an analytic proposition is a proposition that requires no ontological accounting. A synthetic proposition is a proposition whose truth or falsity does call for an ontological accounting. Sentences are analytic or synthetic in virtue of whether they express, respectively, analytic or synthetic propositions.[8] This account, I suggest, goes a long way toward correctly capturing many of our judgments regarding which truth-bearers are analytic or synthetic.[9]

[7] The hedge here is due to the fact that synthetic truths like (M) are themselves semantic, and so have semantic truthmakers.

[8] I imagine Russell (2008) would contest that the sentence "I am here now" is analytic, though it only ever expresses propositions that are synthetic. (Russell argues that analyticity applies to sentences only, not propositions.) I don't believe that the sentence is a clear, uncontroversial case of analyticity, so it strikes me as a case of "spoils to the victor." Another response is that "I am here now" is epistemically but not metaphysically analytic; see Section 7.4.

[9] Jago claims that the analytic/synthetic distinction applies only to sentences, since "Propositions live at the wrong semantic level to be classified in those ways" (2018: 169–170). I don't know why he thinks this to be the case; there is ample precedent for thinking of analyticity as a metaphysical notion, and so relevant to the truthmakers for propositions.

Recall that I am defending two different claims in this chapter. First is that many of the truths that we typically associate with the label "analytic" are ontologically vacuous, and so require no ontological accounting whatsoever. The motivation for this aspect of my view comes from inspection of the actual cases at hand. These truths (that bachelors are unmarried, that rocks are rocks) are not ontologically discriminatory: their being true or not seems to have no bearing on what does or doesn't exist. Furthermore, the sorts of entities one might appeal to as being their truthmakers (such as meanings or concepts) are not suitable, given their contingency. Any motivation for thinking these truths do have truthmakers, it seems to me, would have to come from some antecedent commitment to a theoretical principle like maximalism. Since that is not being presupposed here, the natural view to take of these truths is that they require no substantive ontological accounting (though they have plenty of trivial truthmakers in virtue of their necessity). In this way, they stand out quite clearly from other truths (that Phil is a bachelor, that the rocks on the summit of Everest are primarily limestone) that do call out for ontological accounting.

If these observations about ontological accounting are sound, they can be harnessed and put to work in saying what analyticity is. For a truth to be analytic is for its truth to require no substantive, nontrivial ontological accounting. The lack of such grounds is not just a feature of analytic truths, but also their essence. The motivation for this second dimension of my view is that, extensionally speaking, the account appears to capture the right truths as being analytic. Furthermore, it accomplishes some of the theoretical tasks we might desire from an account of analyticity. For instance (as I argued in the previous section), it captures a sense in which analytic truths are true in virtue of meaning alone. I address other benefits of the account below.

What about the notion of truth by convention? Well, I have offered a sense in which analytic sentences are made true by linguistic conventions. Because those conventions exist, certain marks, motions, and sounds are true. But analytic propositions, being the necessarily true things that they are, are not fit to be nontrivially made true by contingent entities like linguistic conventions. In fact, I've argued that they're not nontrivially made true by *anything*. This admission does not concede that the truth of such propositions is brute fact, or mired in mystery. Why are bachelors unmarried? I'm not sure what the best explanation is of this quite trivial fact, or even if it really needs one. Here's one: by definition, bachelors are unmarried. What I am sure of is that positing the existence of some entity is irrelevant to explaining it; any such posit will fail the following test: x

can't explain the truth of the proposition because it still would have been true had *x* (or anything like it) never existed. I am happy to admit that appealing to our concepts BACHELOR and UNMARRIED can aid in explaining the truth of the proposition (I'm not sure how else one might proceed); what I do not concede is (*contra* Armstrong) that the concepts in any nontrivial way make the proposition true, such that the proposition requires the existence of the concepts for its truth. Put another way, the concepts have no *ontological* role to play in appreciating why the propositions are true. Ultimately, the role of conventions in truthmaking boils down to their role as meaning-makers for sentences. What they don't ever do is (nontrivially) make true propositions – save for those propositions, of course, that are specifically about conventions.

7.3 Quine, Harman, Boghossian

Not only does my modest account vindicate some much-maligned notions, it avoids the objections that have historically underwritten the current skepticism facing them. Quine, for instance, argues that so-called analytic truths need not differ from their synthetic counterparts in terms of what their truth depends on. In discussing the sort of idea I defend, which posits such a difference, Quine complained that we can say that the sentence "Everything is self-identical" "depends for its truth on traits of the language . . . and not on traits of its subject matter; but we can also say, alternatively, that it depends on an obvious trait, viz., self-identity, of its subject matter, viz., everything" (1966a: 106). This is a shocking remark for *Quine* to make, given that he, a nominalist concerning properties, doesn't believe in traits. Traits are nothing, according to the nominalist, so we *can't* say that "Everything is self-identical" is made true by them. Those who believe in metaphysically robust, *sparse* properties – in the form of universals, tropes, or natural classes – can put them to work in truthmaker theory. But it's certainly optional to think of self-identity as one such property, and optional to take it (or states of affairs involving it) to be the truthmaker for logical truths.

Quine, basically, is challenging the idea that supposed analyticities like "Everything is self-identical" are made true in a different way from how supposed synthetic truths like "Every human resides on Earth" are made true. If the truthmaking story applies the same way in both cases (i.e., truths being made true by features of reality), we lose the contrast I aim to draw, and thus lose the hoped-for distinction between analytic and synthetic. Gilbert Harman approvingly echoes this Quinean idea, asking

"what is to prevent us from saying that the truth expressed by "Copper is copper" depends in part on a general feature of the way the world is, namely that everything is self-identical?" (1967: 128). In short, plenty. "That everything is self-identical" seems to me to name a true proposition if it names anything. Calling it a "feature" is a stretch, and citing a true proposition as a truthmaker for another true proposition is bad truthmaker theory. (The only propositions made true by propositions are propositions about propositions like <There are propositions>.) Nor is copper itself a good truthmaker for <Copper is copper>. For the proposition would still be true even had copper never existed, much as <Phlogiston is phlogiston> is true without the benefit of any phlogiston. (Being a universal generalization, the latter is true because its antecedent is empty.)

One way to reconstruct the Quine-Harman view is that supposedly analytic generalities like "Everything is self-identical" depend upon the summation of their instances: what makes it true are A's being self-identical, together with B's being self-identical, together with C's being self-identical, and so on.[10] (I'm assuming for the moment that sense can be made of some entity named by "A's being self-identical." Again, it seems to presume that self-identity is a sparse property, and to require a metaphysics uncongenial to Quine and Harman.) But it strikes me that this is not a plausible theory of what sort of accounting "Everything is self-identical" calls for. For the sentence's truth doesn't depend upon what in fact exists; its truth in no way relies on A or B or C or any of their features. Even had our world contained a completely disjoint set of objects from the ones that in fact exist, it would still be true that everything is self-identical. The Quine-Harman account is more acceptable for contingent generalities. (Though many, myself included, would disagree that such sums serve as truthmakers.) If "All Cretans are liars" were true, that would have depended upon each individual Cretan being a liar; it's a contingent matter whether all Cretans are liars, one which depends upon each individual case. It's not contingent whether all bachelors are male, or whether everything is self-identical, and so it doesn't depend on the individual cases. The Quine-Harman suggestion collapses the distinction between two very different kinds of generalities, much as the "naïve regularity view" of laws of nature collapses the distinction between accidental and lawlike generalizations (see Armstrong 1983). It also succumbs to my earlier

[10] Hofmann and Horvath (2008) accept the analytic/synthetic distinction, but maintain that analytic truths are made true in this Quine-Harman kind of way, exactly parallel to how synthetic truths are made true.

objection of citing a contingent existence as a nontrivial truthmaker for a necessary truth.[11]

Paul Boghossian, for his part, distinguishes metaphysical from epistemological analyticity: truths are metaphysically analytic when they owe their truth entirely to their meaning, and epistemologically analytic when grasp of their meaning is sufficient for being justified in believing them (1996: 363). Boghossian attempts to refute the plausibility of the former by presenting it as "the claim that the *truth of what the sentence expresses* depends on the fact that it is expressed by that sentence, so that we can say that what is expressed wouldn't have been true at all had it not been for the fact that it is expressed by that sentence" (1996: 365). As argued earlier, this view is a nonstarter.[12] It suggests that the truthmaker for (P) is (M), assuming that Boghossian means "true proposition" by "fact." (If his idea is that it is instead some state of affairs of "(M)'s being true" that makes (P) true, he owes us an account of what this state of affairs is. No actual truthmaker theorist makes use of such dubious entities.) If we charitably interpret the suggestion so that it's (M)'s truthmaker T, not (M) itself, that makes (P) true, then I agree that the view is no good; it would suggest that bachelors are unmarried because of how English developed. But why think that the only "metaphysical" account of analyticity must accept this absurdity? Mine doesn't, and Boghossian offers no argument against my suggestion, which certainly deserves the label "metaphysical."[13] Boghossian rightly identifies T as being the wrong truthmaker for (P); (P) has no nontrivial truthmaker. But there is no absurdity in holding that (S) is true in virtue of T: it's T that ensures that (S) expresses something analytically true. The right metaphysical account of analyticity is that (propositional) analyticity is the *absence* of ontological dependence, not its dependence on

[11] This difference in the metaphysical foundations for the different kinds of generalities is, naturally, reflected in the different epistemology for the two. To verify the truth of "All Cretans are liars," we need to investigate each and every last Cretan. Those who adopt the Quine-Harman line need to verify that every individual bachelor is unmarried before accepting the general claim (assuming they accept a parallel connection between what makes a proposition true and how we come to know it), and that is a false epistemological consequence. A virtue of my account is that the uncontroversial asymmetry in the epistemology of these different kinds of generalities is reflected by the asymmetry I have suggested to be underwriting their metaphysics.

[12] According to Thomasson, Boghossian's objections "completely miss the point of the original [conventionalist] view" (2009: 8). For another account of why Boghossian's objection (and others like it) fail, see Warren 2015.

[13] See Hofmann and Horvath (2008) for a different diagnosis of how Boghossian's argument fails. They, too, defend analyticity by way of truthmaker theory, but their approach is diametrically opposed to mine, seeing as how they always provide nontrivial truthmakers for analyticities, whereas I never provide them.

linguistic convention. Sentential analyticity does depend on linguistic convention, but that is entirely unobjectionable.

7.4 Conclusion

Some of the traditional objections to analyticity rest, it seems, on naïve or sloppy interpretations of the ideas underlying truthmaker theory. Quine's and Harman's attempts to offer ontological grounds for analyticities do not stand up to criticism, and Boghossian's characterization of the only avenue for metaphysical analyticity is an uncharitable dead end. Plus, as I shall now show, my account enjoys a number of virtues, including the ability to distinguish analyticity and necessity, and respect for the traditional epistemological role that analyticity has played.

First, my account does not collapse the distinction between necessary and analytic truths. My view admits the theoretical possibility of synthetic, necessary truths. Such truths would necessarily be true, but also depend on the existence of the objects in the world. Earlier, I argued that necessary truths are unfit to be nontrivially made true by contingent objects. So a synthetically necessary truth would be one whose truth depended upon necessary objects. If <God exists> is true, its truth would depend on the existence of God. So, if true, <God exists> is both necessary and synthetic. Similarly, if Platonism about mathematics is correct, then <2 is prime> would depend (at least in part) for its truth on the existence of the necessarily existing 2. The debate over whether mathematical truth is analytic or synthetic is indispensably connected, in my view, to the question of whether mathematical truths depend for their truth upon the existence of objects in the world, necessary or not. I return to this topic in Chapter 11. (For those who believe in synthetically necessary truths and accept necessitation as sufficient for truthmaking, recall the discussion about such truths in Section 3.3.)

Another virtue of my view is that it upholds one of the principal philosophical roles for analyticity to play: accounting for one way in which *a priori* knowledge is possible. It seems a plausible epistemological principle that knowledge generally requires some appropriate cognitive connection to whatever it is that makes propositions true. (Such a principle is the key to one of Gettier's (1963: 122) famous examples.) "Bachelors are unmarried" is knowable *a priori* because all one needs to know in order to know that what it expresses is true is what the words express. The truthmaker for the sentence is just the relevant linguistic convention, acquaintance with which is needed for me to understand the sentence.

Once I understand the sentence, there's nothing more I need to learn, for there is no extra matter of fact that makes the sentence true. The proposition expressed depends on no matter of fact, and so there is no matter of fact with which I need to acquaint myself in order to know its truth-value.

Whether everything that counts as metaphysically analytic by my account also qualifies as epistemically analytic in Boghossian's sense is an open question. For example, the sentence "I am here now" might be thought to be epistemically analytic: knowing what it means is all one needs to know to know it's true, even though it expresses a synthetic proposition which is certainly not metaphysically trivial. If the two notions turn out not to perfectly overlap, perhaps that is to be expected: metaphysics and epistemology engage each other in complicated ways. What I aim to have defended here is that the notion of metaphysical analyticity need not be rejected, and that an ontologically vacuous approach to certain truths is in fact the best perspective to hold on them.

At the end of the day, a decent case can be made for the tenability of the analytic/synthetic distinction, and in a metaphysically relevant way. With the resources of truthmaker theory in hand, we can easily make sense of the idea that an analytic sentence's truthmaker is no more than whatever it is that establishes its meaning. Every sentence is true, at least in part, in virtue of what makes it mean what it does. Some sentences require more – those that express substantive, synthetic propositions. Hence, the truthmaking approach to analyticity vindicates the idea that analyticities are, in Quine's words, a kind of "limiting case" where the world contributes nothing to their truth beyond establishing their meaning (1966a: 106).[14]

The skeptic about analyticity might dispute the intelligibility or acceptability of the notion of ontological accounting that I have been developing in this book. Or the skeptic might question whether any truth actually fits the model of analyticity I have presented. The first kind of skeptic calls into question the entirety of truthmaker theory, and its basic thought that truth depends on reality, and not vice versa. One can adopt that line, but one shouldn't just so as to avoid analyticity. Worries about the analytic/synthetic distinction are not independent grounds for rejecting truthmaker theory. To the second skeptic, I offer the invitation to simply look. It seems to me that <Bachelors are unmarried> depends on no entity for its truth; the skeptic must disagree, and provide the relevant truthmaker.

[14] Russell (2008) abandons this idea in her defense of analyticity, which does not make use of truthmaker theory. I see my concurrence with it as a reason in favor of my view, as it makes it less revisionary in this respect.

I contend that it doesn't depend on Phil the unmarried bachelor, Bill the unmarried bachelor, or any other unmarried bachelor. After all, it would be true even if there were no bachelors. Now, the truth of, say, <There are duck-billed platypuses> doesn't depend on any *particular* duck-billed platypus, but it does depend on there being some duck-billed platypus or other. <Bachelors are unmarried> doesn't depend on any particular bachelor being unmarried either, but it doesn't depend on there being any unmarried bachelors at all. There's no "way" the world needs to be for <Bachelors are unmarried> to be true, other than, I suppose, the trivial way of being logically consistent. It is up to the skeptic to tell us, with independent ontological motivation, what it is that makes <Red things are colored> and <Unicorns are unicorns> true.

The better view is to accept that some propositions owe their truth to nothing whatsoever in existence. That some truths fail to be nontrivially made true is no strike against the basic motivations behind truthmaker theory. Truthmaker theory advocates ontological accounting and responsibility; but we don't need ontology to properly account for why it's true that bachelors are bachelors, and that existing things exist. Those truths can be explained without reference to ontology – what's easier to explain than why bachelors are bachelors? – and so they need not fall under the umbrella of substantive inquiry into truthmaking.

CHAPTER 8

Realism

Realism – as its name suggests – ought to be thought of primarily as a metaphysical thesis. Realism is a commitment to reality, and reality is the domain of metaphysical study. Though realism is connected to matters both epistemological and semantic, I suggest it be construed as fundamentally a metaphysical view. Hence, when we contemplate the thorny question of what realism is, I suggest that we employ the notion of truthmaking. Truthmaker theory, which falls squarely within the domain of metaphysics, is perfectly suited to articulate what realism is all about. It therefore enjoys an advantage over attempts to define realism in terms of truth, reference, or any semantic notion. In this chapter, I present a truthmaker-based conception of the debate between realism and antirealism, and showcase its virtues in helping us to understand a perennial metaphysical topic.

8.1 Truthmaking, Not Truth

I begin by defending my general approach of defining realism in terms of truthmaking, rather than the alternative of defining it in terms of truth. The project of defining realism by way of truth could come in two forms. First, one might define realism via one's theory of the nature of truth. That is to say, one might argue that realism requires a commitment to a particular theory of truth, or that foreclosing on certain kinds of truth involves foreclosing on certain positions within the realism debate. Second, one might define realism in terms of what *truths* there are, while staying neutral on the nature of truth itself. The first approach I believe to be misguided, whereas the second is on the right path, but doesn't go far enough.

Hilary Putnam once observed that the idea "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). Indeed, debates over realism and idealism in turn-of-the-century metaphysics were closely connected to the debate over whether truth should be understood in correspondence or coherence fashion. Against this background, it makes sense why those who defend deflationary theories of truth – and thereby dodge the standard substantive views and their rich metaphysical implications – might have thought that they were also leaving behind realism and idealism. But as I argued back in Section 6.4, the right perspective for deflationists to take is that their theory of truth is neutral with respect to the grand metaphysical questions. It does not lead to quietism.[1]

A first reason not to build theories of truth directly into one's theory of realism is that it imposes an unfortunate constraint on one's ability to hold a nuanced view concerning realism. For instance, one might find it theoretically desirable to maintain an antirealist stance about normative domains such as ethics and aesthetics, but a realist stance about nonnormative domains such as physics and biology. If one pursues such a nonglobalist approach to realism, but different views on realism require different views of truth, then one is forced into a nonglobalist – i.e., pluralist – account of truth. Consider Arthur Fine's view about scientific realism (1984a, 1984b, 1986). According to Fine, scientific realists are distinguished by their acceptance of a correspondence theory of truth, whereas scientific antirealists are marked by their acceptance of some kind of epistemic theory of truth. What, then, of theorists who independently defend the correspondence theory of truth? These theorists would be committed to realism about every domain in which they committed to any truths. Epistemic theorists about truth would likewise be forced into antirealism about every domain with any truth.

In order to maintain a nonglobal perspective on realism, such theorists have few options. Correspondence theorists would have to be error theorists (e.g., Mackie 1977 and Field 1980) or noncognitivists (e.g., Ayer 1952) about domains for which they wanted to adopt antirealism. Epistemic theorists about truth would not be allowed to be realists about anything. If realism and truth are as woven together as Fine makes them out to be, the best option would be to pursue a pluralist theory of truth. In fact, this is one of the main motivations for Wright's pluralistic approach to realism debates (1992). According to Wright, one's views vis-à-vis

[1] For various defenses of quietism, see Fine 1984a, 1984b, and 1986, Rorty 1986, Maddy 2001, Blackburn 2002, and Horwich 2006.

realism for a domain correspond to one's views vis-à-vis truth for that domain. In realist domains, a correspondence-style theory of truth is appropriate. In antirealist domains, a verificationist, pragmatic, or epistemic theory is more suitable. (This approach is further elaborated in Michael Lynch's work, e.g., Lynch 2009.)

The upshot is that one's hands are extremely tied if realism is to be defined in terms of specific theories of truth. This is not a knock-down argument against the view: Lynch's pluralism, for instance, embraces it. But it would be highly preferable not to be backed into a corner for pursuing something as straightforward as defending a nuanced view about realism.[2] Should one not opt for pluralism, one might be similarly disinclined to give in to noncognitivism or error theory so quickly. After all, few endorse traditional noncognitivism nowadays, and error theory can be a tough row to hoe (as nicely argued in Wright 1992).

A second reason to doubt that realism about a domain forces a view about truth is that it would suggest, falsely, that deflationists somehow stay out of the fray. If correspondence means realism, and verificationism or coherentism means antirealism, then deflationism presumably means neither. But consider the following view. It maintains that there exists an infinite number of concrete possible worlds, of which ours is just one. These other worlds are just as real as ours, their inhabitants no more ontological fictions than we are ourselves. These worlds and the objects that dwell within them provide the ontological grounds for the truths of possibility of our own world. It's true that I could have been an electrician because I bear the counterpart relation to an individual quite similar to myself who is in fact an electrician, albeit in some other possible world spatiotemporally disconnected from ours. To my ear, this view – David Lewis's (1986), of course – is quintessential modal realism. Notice, however, that I have said nothing with respect to what theory of truth is at stake. Furthermore, if I add onto the view a distrust of the correspondence theory of truth – as Lewis does (2001a, 2001b) – does that remove the claim to realism? No. Lewis rejects the idea that the sentence "There is a pluriverse of infinitely many concrete possible worlds" stands in a correspondence relation to some fact. But that is no matter: Lewis is a realist about possible worlds because he commits to the existence of concrete possible worlds, not because he believes that certain sentences stand in certain relations to other sorts of objects.

[2] Additionally, there are independent problems for pluralism, which I have presented in Asay 2018a.

The point, then, is that a realist view about some domain can be perfectly well articulated without recourse to the theory of truth. My takeaway is that it's not so much what one thinks about the theory of *truth* for a particular domain that is relevant to realism, but rather what one thinks is going on with respect to the *truthmakers* for that domain that settles one's views vis-à-vis realism.

Consider now the second way of using truth to define realism. On such a view, what makes one a realist is what one takes to be true, not what one takes truth to be. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord has offered an influential statement of this view: "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). When it comes to scientific realism, Bas van Fraassen has offered a similar definition: "Science aims to give us, in its theories, a literally true story of what the world is like; and acceptance of a scientific theory involves the belief that it is true" (1980: 8, emphasis removed). For Sayre-McCord and van Fraassen, realism about a domain is to believe that the true claims of that domain are literally true. In my view, this condition is necessary but not sufficient to describe realism that is worthy of the name. Consider the idealist (cf. Cameron 2008d: 118–120). The idealist might agree that <The White House is on Pennsylvania Avenue> is literally true, but made true by solely mind-dependent entities, as the very concept of a mind-independent material substance is incoherent. The moral relativist might agree that my utterance of "Slavery is wrong" is literally true, but note that the logical analysis of my judgment involves unstated parameters that relate my judgment to a moral framework which I accept. The social constructionist might, like Latour (1998), believe that <The tuberculosis bacillus exists> is literally true, but true in virtue only of our discovery of it. In each of these cases, we do not have paradigm examples of realist attitudes on display. Yet they can all embrace that the truths in question are literal truths. What else unites them is the fact that the grounds for these truths are not anything in the neighborhood of a "mind-independent external world." Rather, the grounds for the truths in question are ideas in the mind, cultural frameworks, and events in human history. With no minds and their activities around, none of these claims would be true, according to the relevant views.

Hence, once again I draw the moral that what constitutes realism is not *that* one accepts some domain of claims to be true, but *how* one does so. That is, what separates realists from antirealists is how the truths in question (if any) get grounded; their being true is not enough to guarantee

realism. To co-opt Blackburn's phrasing: "it is not what you end up saying, but how you get to say it, that defines your 'ism'" (1993: 7).

8.2 Realism and Truthmaking: First Passes

Truthmaker theory provides an appropriate backdrop against which to understand the nature of realism. So how is realism best articulated, from the vantage point of truthmaking? The connection between realism and truthmaking has long been noticed. In this frequently cited passage, Bigelow unites truthmaking and realism:

> 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)

The suggestion is that when truthmaking is in place, realism is secured. To abandon truthmakers is to court idealism and pragmatism. Following Charlie Martin, John Heil writes that truthmaking "captures a central tenet of realism: when a statement concerning the world is true, there must be something about the world that makes it true" (2003: 61; cf. Simons 2000b: 30). Mulligan, Simons, and Smith offer their theory of truthmaking "in a realist spirit" (1984: 289). Finally, Armstrong 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," and takes the plausibility of this notion "to be the charter for truthmaking theory" (2003: 12). As Armstrong puts it: "To demand truthmakers for particular truths is to accept a *realist* theory for these truths" (2004: 5).

Despite the frequent association of truthmaking with realism, the chorus is not fully unified. With Dummett (1958–1959: 157) in mind, Stephen Read asserts that truthmaking "could be accepted by some anti-realists" (2000: 68). Others have suggested that the idea of truthmaking can be put to use by idealists and pragmatists (e.g., Daly 2005, Pihlström 2005, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005: 21, Cameron 2008d, Freitag 2008: 230, and Tahko 2016). Michael Pendlebury writes that "the realism of the Truth-maker Program is an uncritical article of faith that is simply taken for granted" (2010: 145). I agree with these writers that truthmaking is not exclusive territory for realists,[3] yet I do believe that realism and its

[3] See also Forrest and Khlentzos 2000: 5, and Jago 2018: 6–7.

opposition are best understood in terms of truthmaking. In this section and the next, I present what I take to be the correct way of understanding the relationship, beginning with what I see as some false starts in articulating their connection.[4]

Consider the thought from Armstrong and others that in accepting that a certain set of truths have truthmakers, one thereby becomes a realist for those truths. I argue against this proposal by considering counterexamples that challenge both the necessity and sufficiency of having truthmakers for realism. I already invoked the case against sufficiency. Idealists may have a stock of necessitating truthmakers in their ontology, ready to provide ontological grounds for many truths. <There is a tree in the quad> might be made true by both the tree and the quad, to which the idealist happily commits. The idealist simply points out that the tree and the quad are not material objects, but ideas that depend upon their being perceived in order to exist. Therefore, having truthmakers for a stock of truths is consistent with rejecting realism for that set of truths.

As for the necessity of truthmakers for realism, consider any plausible truthmaker gap, a truth without a truthmaker. As we've seen, the case for truthmaker gaps is contentious, and some deny their existence. I've argued for their presence, but even if I'm wrong about that, I have established that entertaining the possibility of truthmaker gaps is not in and of itself a rejection of truthmaking. Suppose, then, that <Unicorns don't exist> is a truthmaker gap. Is this a concession to idealism or pragmatism? I don't see why. The standard nonmaximalist reply here is that <Unicorns don't exist> is still grounded by ontology in the following way: its truth-value depends on the world's ontology. Had it been false, the ontology would have been different: it would have contained unicorns. The truth-value of <Unicorns don't exist> is not independent of what does or doesn't exist in the world. It's just that as a negative existential it lacks a necessitating truthmaker. This account, regardless of whether or not it is ultimately tenable, is no admission of antirealism. It doesn't suggest that <Unicorns don't exist> enjoys its truth-value because of its relation to other propositions – as coherence theorists might maintain. It doesn't hold that its truth is specifically constrained by epistemic or pragmatic matters, unlike the truth of positive existentials. Being a truthmaker gap, then, need not have any implications for realism. One can be a realist about the body of truths regarding which animals do or don't exist without having to commit

[4] I develop the ideas in this section and the next more fully in Asay 2012.

to truthmakers for each of those truths. Interestingly, Bigelow himself denies that negative existentials have truthmakers, but doesn't then worry about crashing into the shoals of antirealism. Truthmakers are not necessary for realism.

A better account of how realism and truthmaking fit together is offered by Cameron:

> To be a realist about a discourse is (i) to think that the sentences of the discourse are, when literally construed, literally true or false and (ii) to think that some sentences of the discourse are non-vacuously literally true and (iii) to think that the grounds of those true sentences exist/obtain mind-independently (and that this fact is itself a mind-independent matter). (2008d: 122)

Cameron's view has a number of salient virtues. Condition (i) entails that traditional noncognitivists are nonrealists. Condition (iii) is included to account for those antirealists, quite common nowadays, who want to maintain that there can be literal truth for certain domains without thereby conceding realism. Constructivists, idealists, relativists, subjectivists, and quasirealists do not – like traditional noncognitivists and error theorists – earn their antirealism by denying the existence of truth in the relevant domain. They earn their antirealism by providing antirealist *grounds* for those truths.

Cameron's view is a significant improvement to our understanding of truthmaking and realism, but it still has shortcomings. First, there is an ambiguity in condition (iii) that affects its plausibility. Suppose I'm a realist with respect to <Red pandas exist>. Condition (iii) imposes two constraints. First, I need to think that the grounds for <Red pandas exist> exist mind-independently. On my view, the ontological grounds for <Red pandas exist> are the truthmakers for it, which include each and every last red panda. Suppose Fergal is one such red panda. To be a realist about <Red pandas exist>, Fergal needs to exist mind-independently, which is more than plausible. But something else, on Cameron's view, needs to be mind-independent. The question is what "this fact" in his parenthetical refers to. Its most apparent referent would be to the fact stated in condition (iii) before the parenthetical, namely, <Fergal exists mind-independently>. The truth of this claim is presumably a mind-independent matter. If Fergal's existence is mind-independent, then presumably the truth of <Fergal exists mind-independently> is a mind-independent matter. On this reading, Cameron's parenthetical is acceptable, but vacuous. It doesn't add any content to condition (iii).

The alternative reading, then, is that "this fact" refers to something else, namely, <Fergal is the ontological grounds for <Red pandas exist>>. Cameron seems to confirm this reading when he says: "You don't count as a realist about <p> if you think that some feature of the world grounds <p> but are an anti-realist about the fact that it grounds <p>" (2008d: 122). Hence, Cameron's view requires that not only must the truthmakers or grounds in question exist mind-independently, but their playing the role of truthmaker or grounds must itself be a mind-independent fact. Now, Cameron does not elaborate upon what it would be to take grounding or truthmaking claims themselves to be mind-independent. The standard view in the truthmaking literature is that the truthmaking relation obtains in virtue of the *de re* modal essences of its relata (Fox 1987: 189, Merricks 2007: 11–14). Socrates is a truthmaker for <Humans exist> because the property *being human* belongs to Socrates' essence. (And perhaps also, as in Lowe's (2007) view, because *being such that it's true if Socrates exists* belongs to the essence of <Humans exist>.) I presume that the standard view is that an object's *de re* modal profile is a mind-independent matter.[5] The intriguing proposal opened up by Cameron's analysis is that, perhaps sometimes, the truthmaking relation itself needs to be understood in antirealist fashion; this would provide one avenue for antirealism. I consider it below in more detail in Section 8.4.

One shortcoming of Cameron's account is that it ineffectively handles error theory. Condition (ii) is intended to capture error theory's antirealism in the following way. Consider the error theorist about mathematics. The error theorist agrees with the realist that <All even numbers are divisible by 2> is true. The reason why is that the error theorist sees a universal conditional here with an empty antecedent. <All even numbers are divisible by 2> is true, and for the same reason that both <All even numbers are indivisible by 2> and <All even numbers make for delicious pastrami sandwiches> are true. There are no even numbers, and so any universal generalization featuring even numbers in the antecedent are "vacuously" true. The realist, by contrast, maintains that <All even numbers are divisible by 2> is nonvacuously true, in that it's accounted for by the properties of mathematical objects.

Cameron's condition is on the right track, but the issue of what amounts to "vacuous" truth is tricky in contexts of truthmaking. Suppose, for independent reasons, that our mathematical error theorist is a

[5] I consider the implications for truthmaking should one reject the idea that *de re* modal profiles are mind-independent in Asay 2013d. I return to this topic in Chapter 9.

maximalist about truthmaking. (There is no inherent tension in the combination.) Our error theorist, then, needs to provide a truthmaker for <All even numbers are indivisible by 2>, and for all other mathematical claims that must be accepted as true, even by error theorists. Perhaps it's Armstrong's totality state of affairs, or some other entity designed to answer the problem of negative existentials. It will surely be different from the truthmaker offered by the realist, but a truthmaker nonetheless. And if the error theorist provides a truthmaker for the claim, it's doubtful that the claim is "vacuously" true.

The takeaway point is that it's difficult to countenance the idea of vacuous truth once we have truthmaking in the background. For maximalists, all truths require truthmakers, and this would suggest that vacuous truth has no place in maximalist truthmaker theory. Thus, Cameron's account pushes the maximalist error theorist into the realist camp: certain mathematical claims are true, and made true by a mind-independent reality (such as the totality state of affairs).

Another deficiency in Cameron's account is illustrated by agnostic positions such as van Fraassen's constructive empiricism (1980). For constructive empiricism, the aim of science is to develop theories that are empirically adequate, which is to say that they are true with respect to the observable features of the world. Whether a theory speaks truly of the unobservable dimensions of reality is not a constraint on acceptable science. The problem for Cameron is that constructive empiricists can accept each of his conditions for realism. They can accept that scientific theories that deal with unobservables are literally true or false, that some existing theories may well *be* true, and that their truth is a fully mind-independent matter. The constructive empiricist is not interested in instrumentalist or positivistic reinterpretations of science. There may well be quarks, atoms, and DNA molecules; it's just that scientific investigation doesn't provide us with evidence of their existence. Nevertheless, the claims within scientific theories are true or false, and mind-independently so. The constructive empiricist just doesn't know which ones are the true ones. Cameron's account, therefore, incorrectly classifies constructive empiricists as realists with respect to unobservables.

Finally, there is reason not to rely so heavily on the notion of mind-independence, as Cameron's account does. To take a simple example, consider the realism debate concerning mental states such as beliefs. According to eliminative materialism, beliefs and other mental states do not exist (e.g. Churchland 1981). Realists about belief insist that they do, and serve as truthmakers for claims about, say, the dispositions of the

mind, such as <If asked where he was born, Obama would answer "Hawaii">. But beliefs are not straightforward cases of mind-independent entities, for the obvious reason that if there were no minds, there would be no beliefs. Mind-independence is a reasonable proxy for what realists are after, but it is at best an approximation.

8.3 Realism and Truthmaking: Final Account

Cameron's account of realism has a number of virtues, and my own positive account maintains them while also fixing the problems I have identified. Here, then, is my proposed account of realism:

> To be a realist with respect to a set of claims is (i) to be committed to the truth of some particular claims from the set, (ii) to be committed to an 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 relevant fashion.

My account captures what is realist about, say, Lewis's view on possible worlds (1986), or Armstrong's view on laws of nature (1983). In such cases, the realist commits to the relevant set of *truths*, the right kind of *truthmakers*, and the right kind of *truthmaking*. Noncognitivists, fictionalists, and constructive empiricists get off the realism boat with condition (i). Ayer (1952) thinks there are no ethical truths; fictionalists about a domain think there are no truths regarding it. Constructive empiricists might claim that some statements about unobservables *are* in fact true, but commit to the truth of no particular claim that involves unobservables.

Condition (ii) rules out idealists, subjectivists, relativists, constructivists, and others who want to find an antirealist ontology for some domain of truths. It also allows space for ruling out error theorists. Recall the thought that needs to be captured. Suppose the mathematical error theorist is a truthmaker maximalist. In that case, the error theorist might posit a totality state of affairs to account for the truth of <All even numbers are divisible by 2>. So, too, might the Platonist about mathematics. But it's clear that the Platonist's totality state of affairs will involve as components Platonic numbers, whereas the error theorist's won't. *That* difference is the essential one. What separates the error theorist and realist in this case is not *whether* they have a mind-independent truthmaker for the claim, but rather *what* specifically that truthmaker is. If pressed for a general and comprehensive account of just what character these realism-relevant

truthmakers need to have in every case, I reject the demand. Mathematical realists and their opponents need to articulate what their ontological debate is about; moral realists and their opponents need to articulate what their ontological debate is about. The answer might be different in different domains. The most general thing that is worth saying is that realism will come down to the character of the truthmaking ontology that is relevant to the domain at hand. "Realism" is a term of art, and it is fundamentally *our* term for characterizing certain territories of ontological debate. Whether there is anything more specific that is essential to all the views we label "realist" is a matter that cannot be settled independently of looking at each and every individual realism debate. I examine the specific cases of ethical and scientific realism in this chapter. Chapter 11 focuses on the relevance of truthmaking to mathematics.

Condition (iii) is in place to rule out views like Blackburn's (1984, 1998) quasirealism, which, I argue, can go so far as to claim that the truths of certain domains are true in virtue of a mind-independent reality. Yet such views need not collapse into realism, so long as there is room for understanding the grounding relationship in a way conducive to antirealism. Because this idea has not received sufficient articulation, I dedicate the next section to it. In Section 8.5 I return to metaethics specifically, and show how my positive account of realism can make sense of the ongoing debate in metaethics, and in a way that avoids the problem of "creeping minimalism."

8.4 Projectivist Truthmaking

During his brief discussion of Moore's famous open question argument (1903), Blackburn provides the following description of Moore's view: "In effect, Moore pointed out that 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; emphasis added). What I see in this statement is a *metaphysical* gloss on the phenomenon of the open question, rather than the semantic structure that Moore provides it. For Moore, any viable definition of "good" must pass the open question test. If "good" is said to be defined by "x," then the question "But is x good?" had better not be open, lest the proposed definition fail. For a century, critics of Moore's argument have pointed out that the argument fails for various reasons, either because it succumbs to the paradox of analysis, or supposes that metaphysical natures must be reflected in conceptual or semantic analyses. Blackburn's text invites a

metaphysical perspective on the open question that isn't undermined by the realization that not all metaphysical analyses are accessible via *a priori* conceptual reflection.

Suppose you and I both judge that giving a certain amount of money to a particular charity is a good thing. We agree, then, on the truth-value of a first-order ethical judgment, namely, <Giving money to charity X is good>. We might, however, offer contrasting accounts of what determines the truth-value of our shared judgment. I might think that what grounds the judgment are facts about the duties I hold with respect to other individuals; you might think that what grounds the judgment are facts about what would maximize happiness among sentient creatures. In the language of truthmaking, we can in principle agree on which moral judgments are true while disagreeing about what makes them true. It's an open question what the ontological grounds are for moral judgments – and it's unclear what sort of further empirical investigation could reveal them.[6]

Dialectically speaking, open question arguments are intended to push against naturalistic approaches to morality. Nonnaturalists believe that the natural world in and of itself is not sufficient to "settle" the moral facts. Nature isn't intrinsically evaluative, as one might put it. The matter of what does then settle the truth-values of moral judgments is a wide-open metaethical question, and one that may receive either a realist or antirealist analysis. Nonnaturalistic realists posit the existence of a *sui generis* moral structure to the universe, whereas antirealists – or one strand of antirealists, anyway – focus on the contribution that we as *evaluators* make to moral judgment. According to Blackburn's projectivist, the process of making moral judgments is not one of *discovery*, but *projection*. The moral properties that belong to actors and actions are not antecedently present in objects, waiting to be uncovered. Rather, we ourselves "gild and stain" the world with moral properties, to borrow Hume's phrase (1998: 163). We discover how the world is, evaluate it, and then judge how it ought to be.

My goal here is not to defend projectivism as a metaethical view (though I am sympathetic to it). Rather, it is to show how projectivists can use – and in fact have already been using – the idea of truthmaking in a way that doesn't compromise their antirealism. Consider this particularly revealing passage from Blackburn:

[6] Actually, I think that it's an open question for *any* judgment what its truthmaker is – that's why truthmaker theory is contentious metaphysical territory, not to be settled by semantic analysis (unless such analysis is itself metaphysically partisan).

> 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)

Blackburn here disavows the suggestion that his quasirealism has subjectivist consequences. The ethical subjectivist thinks that what makes moral judgments true are the actual desires and responses of those who make the moral judgments. Blackburn, however, rejects that account of the grounds for moral judgments. Our conative profiles may be responsible for what gets *expressed* by our moral judgments, or for what makes our moral judgments *sincere*, but it does not provide the ontological grounds for their truth.

As a result, a projectivist about ethics can maintain that what makes moral judgments true are the objective features of the natural world. Put simply, Blackburn says, "what makes it wrong to kick dogs is that it causes them pain" (1981: 179). So suppose some object *a* is a truthmaker for <Kicking dogs causes them pain>. The projectivist can maintain that *a* is also a truthmaker for <Kicking dogs is wrong>. Because *a* exists, kicking dogs results in pain, which is itself sufficient for establishing that it's wrong to kick dogs. The object *a*, whatever it turns out to be, would seem to be a perfectly naturalistic entity (depending, I suppose, on whether a naturalistic account of the mind is ultimately available). In fact, it might be the same entity that a naturalistic moral realist (e.g., Railton 1986) would cite as a truthmaker for <Kicking dogs is wrong>. So where do we locate the antirealism that motivates projectivism? My suggestion is that it is to be found not in the truthmaker, but in the truthmaking. How does *a* get to be a truthmaker for a moral judgment? The answer for the projectivist is not the familiar one. It is not because of the *de re* modal properties of *a* (which, in turn, establish which objects necessitate which truths). The reason why *a* is a truthmaker for <Kicking dogs causes them pain> has to do with its essential features: something about *a* guarantees that the world is one where kicking leads to pain. But how do we move from facts about pain to facts about wrongness? This bridge is not written into the metaphysical essence of *a*: we evaluate the states of affairs that *a* brings about as ones that are wrong, and that should be avoided. No amount of metaphysical analysis into *a*'s nature will reveal the wrongness of kicking dogs unless we bring to the analysis an evaluative stance.

That Blackburn is thinking along the lines I have suggested here is evident in his response to the "Cornell realists," one school of naturalistic

ethical realism. He writes: "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). But, he says, "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 read Blackburn here as expressing sympathy with the idea that ethical truths have truthmakers – "Ethical avowals, like decisions and verdicts, require grounds" (1998: 69) – but thinking that the ontological story of what grounds ethical judgments is not complete until it captures the role of the evaluator in making the ethical judgment. For the realist, claims about right and wrong are true in virtue of the facts about pain, just as claims about water are true in virtue of the facts about H_2O. For the projectivist, however, there is a giant difference. To say that H_2O grounds facts about water is not to take on any evaluative stance; the relationship is fully accounted for by way of the nature of water and H_2O. However, to say that pain grounds the facts about right and wrong is to take an evaluative stance; this sort of grounding claim will never be revealed by any sort of conceptual or metaphysical analysis. To state facts about the grounds for moral judgments is to be engaged already in evaluative discourse. As a result, it will always be an open question as to which evaluative stance is the correct one; to debate evaluative stances is to engage in ethical inquiry. There is no external stance from which one can independently discover the correct stance.

I maintain, then, that the metaphysical views in the neighborhood of projectivism, expressivism, and quasirealism are compatible with the basic picture of truthmaking; quasirealists can and should maintain that ethical judgments have truthmakers. My account of realism shows how such views nevertheless remain antirealist. By rejecting condition (iii), such views show how truths get made in an antirealism-relevant way. Projectivism, in my view, is an antirealist account of truthmaking. The process of "gilding and staining" the world, and the process of speaking from the perspective of an ethical stance, are processes of determining truthmaking. When I say which natural features of the world are responsible for the moral features of the world, I am articulating a view about the truthmakers for moral judgments. But, as I hope should be clear, the projectivist story is a thoroughly antirealist one, given how it suggests that moral properties are not out there in the world, independent of us, awaiting discovery. Again, my goal here is not to show that the

projectivist gives the correct metaethical view; rather, I'm arguing that it is and always has been an antirealist view about the ontological grounds for moral truth, and thus fits into the structure of realism debates that my theory of truthmaking has to offer.

8.5 Moral Realism

The best way to evaluate an account of what realism is is to see how well it captures what is going on within an ongoing realism debate. Metaethics provides a convenient case, as one issue within it is whether or not deflationary theories of truth and related notions threaten to erase the supposed division between realist and antirealist views. This potential problem – labeled *creeping minimalism* by James Dreier (2004) – is that the traditional means for dividing realists and antirealists might be lost if certain philosophical views are adopted. If the realist and antirealist perspectives collapse into one another, then what is the debate really about?

Creeping minimalism is fueled by quasirealism, the metaphysical program that seeks to situate some domain of thought within an antirealist metaphysical setting while nevertheless maintaining, as far as possible, the trappings of realism. Ethical quasirealists, then, seek to uphold the truth-aptness of moral judgments (against traditional emotivism), the truth of many moral judgments (against error theory), and even the objectivity of ethical discourse (against relativism and subjectivism). Quasirealists may in good conscience claim that in asserting that torture is wrong, they are expressing their belief in the truth of the proposition that torture is wrong, which would continue being true even if they ceased believing so, because the proposition is true in virtue of what torture does to individuals, not the sentiments that it evokes within us. But if quasirealists embrace so much realist rhetoric, it becomes unclear why they haven't collapsed into realists (or whether there is even a genuine debate to be had).

A tool that (supposedly) aids quasirealists in their endeavor is minimalism. The minimalist about truth, for instance, maintains that in order for $<p>$ to be true, it just has to be the case that p. It doesn't need to be the case that $<p>$ must also stand in a relation of correspondence to some entity. For correspondence theory, truth always accompanies ontology, in the form of corresponding entities (facts or otherwise). Minimalism, by eschewing the direct connection posited by correspondence theory between truth and ontology, might then seem to offer a way for earning truth without ontology. And that is precisely what the quasirealist desires:

a way to secure the truth of moral judgments without succumbing to a realist metaphysics.

This line of thought, however, is flawed. Identifying its mistake provides the solution to the problem of creeping minimalism.[7] Minimalism (or deflationism) about truth is *not* the view that when something is true, it requires no connection to ontology. As I've argued, deflationary theories of truth are *silent* with respect to the ontology grounding truths – they do not take the positive stance that truths carry no ontology with them. The question of what sort of ontology is determined by one's stock of truths falls under the purview of truthmaker theory, towards which deflationism is ultimately neutral. Yes, deflationists maintain that so long as torture is immoral, it's true that torture is immoral. *Everyone* – minimalist or not about truth – can agree with that truism. But in denying the correspondence theorist's particular ontological view here – that there must be some entity that corresponds to <Torture is immoral> – the deflationist does not thereby deny that <Torture is immoral> has no connections to ontology. It just maintains that a theory of truth need not speak to the matter. To say that <Torture is immoral> is true without any contribution from the world is to go beyond deflationism, and to endorse, in effect, the view that true moral judgments are brute facts whose truth is in no way reflected by reality.[8]

Quasirealists, as I showed in the previous section, do not think that moral judgments are true independently of what is going on in the world. "Ethical avowals," Blackburn writes, "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). If it's wrong to kick dogs, then this has to be because of what our world is like, and what it contains. If kicking dogs caused them immeasurable happiness rather than pain, then it wouldn't be true that it's wrong to kick them. Hence, it's simply not the case that being a minimalist about truth is a way of securing antirealism about some domain of truths. It avoids the correspondence theorists' particular ontological posits, but it does not avoid ontological positing in general.

[7] For more on my solution, see Asay 2013e.

[8] Shafer-Landau suggests that one way to understand his nonnaturalistic moral realism is as the view that moral facts are brute facts (2003: 48). Donelson (2018) refers to this sort of view as "minimalism," and attributes it to Rorty (1982), Dworkin (1996), Putnam (2004), and Scanlon (2014). As will be clear below, I do not recommend this way of articulating realism.

Truth, again, is not the issue. It's not your views about *truth* that determine your perspective on realism, but rather your perspective on what the ontological grounds for *truths* are. Minimalism about truth doesn't accompany any sort of view as to what the ontological grounds for truths are, and so doesn't have any impact on the debate between realists and antirealists. Their debate is an ontological one, and to be a deflationist about truth is not to be a deflationist about ontology, whatever that might mean. (Just think, again, of David Lewis.) What separates moral realists and antirealists is, and always has been, their views about the ontological grounds for moral truths, and how those grounds and truths relate to one another. Hence, what is at stake in debates over moral realism is best articulated in terms of truthmakers, and, accordingly, is not threatened by minimalist views of truth.

In order to see why there is no threat of collapse within the moral realism debate, consider how the various positions within the debate can be identified in terms of their relationship to moral truthmakers. The first commitment of the realist, on my account, is to some set of moral claims actually being true. The classical emotivist (e.g., Ayer 1952) gets off the boat at this first stage. The error theorist (e.g., Mackie 1977) presumably believes that some claims within the domain of morality are true: for example, <It is not the case that slavery is immoral> and <All immoral acts are praiseworthy>. But the error theorist abandons condition (ii), as becomes apparent when the view is more fully spelled out. Condition (ii) is that the truths from condition (i) owe their truth to a realism-relevant ontology. The error theorist may be committed to some truths from the ethical domain, but the ontology supporting them does not point toward moral realism. No ethical properties are posited; there are no *sui generis* normative facts. Even if these claims have mind-independent truthmakers (recall that anyone with a totality state of affairs may well have a mind-independent truthmaker for each and every last truth), they do not have the character that is relevant to moral realism. Moral realists believe that there is a distinctively ethical dimension to the universe, or that the natural world is itself intrinsically ethical. The error theorist shares neither commitment, and for that reason any concession to the existence of ethical truth (and truthmakers for them) is no concession to realism.

Relativists (Harman 1975) and subjectivists are also best thought of as rejecting commitment (ii). Though ethical claims may be true and have truthmakers, their truthmakers are of a notably antirealist flavor. They may be social conventions, individual or collective desires and sentiments, or even individual beliefs. Quasirealists (e.g., Blackburn 1984 and 1998) can

accept condition (ii), but reject the final condition: they give a projectivist account of the relationship between moral truth and moral truthmaker. When some natural state of affairs (pain, say) makes true a moral judgment (about the wrongness of torture, say), this is not due to the mind-independent *de re* modal profile of the pain. It is not a part of pain's essence to produce wrongness. (At least, not unless one is *already* projecting moral features into essences.) Wrongness is projected onto the pain by we who are in a position to hold and defend values, and thereby embody an evaluative stance.

Naturalistic realists, such as those belonging to the Cornell school (e.g., Brink 1989), disagree with quasirealists on this last point. What is naturalistic about their view is that the ethical features of the world are already either identical or reducible to the naturalistic features of the world. We don't gild and stain the world: nature comes ethically pretreated. Naturalists may agree with quasirealists, in principle, as to what makes moral judgments true, but they have a different position regarding how those things got to be truthmakers for moral judgments in the first place. Hence, naturalistic realists adopt all three conditions of realism. Nonnaturalistic realists (e.g., Moore 1903, Shafer-Landau 2003) also accept all three conditions (or should, anyway), though they disagree with naturalists as to what the ontological grounds are. Is the natural world sufficient to account for the truth of moral claims? Nonnaturalists think that it is not, and hence there is a need for *sui generis* moral ontology, in whatever form that might take. (Whether moral facts or moral properties are called for will depend on one's broader ontological views, which include views as to the ontological tenability of facts, properties, and the like.)

My accounting so far has not, of course, been comprehensive. My hypothesis is that understanding a metaethical position with respect to how it fits into the dialectic between moral realism and its opposition will best be served by asking what the position's stance is with respect to the ontological grounds (if any) for moral truths (if any). As a result, my view is silent regarding the status of certain metaethical positions. Consider for example, an ideal observer theory. Here is a statement from Roderick Firth, who 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). Firth's primary claim here is a view about the synonymy between straightforwardly ethical claims and counterfactual claims about how an ideal observer would react. It analyzes ethical judgments into nonethical judgments. Should Firth's view be

thought of as realist or antirealist? My account is silent, and appropriately so. What makes Firth's counterfactuals true? He doesn't say. There are no ideal observers, so it's unclear what grounds the facts about what such fictional entities would do. We won't know if Firth's view avoids or succumbs to realism until we find out what grounds his counterfactuals. If a *sui generis* normative ontology ends up making them true, then Firth's view is a realist one. If Firth or other constructivists want to distance themselves from realism, they need to give an appropriately nonrealist account of the ontology underlying their counterfactuals (cf. Shafer-Landau 2003: 41).[9]

By way of closing, recall that I have offered no general recipe for what gives a set of ontological grounds a realist "flavor," as required by condition (ii). The posits of Moore and the Cornell realists have it; those of relativists and subjectivists do not. Judgments about realism and antirealism are not tracking some sort of mind-independent fact of the matter as to when a set of truths is truly "realist" or not, but rather our attitudes toward particular metaphysical views. To see which attitudes tend to be assigned "realist" and those which don't, we have to examine the enterprise in question. The metaphysical understanding of ethics is very different if one views the ontology underlying it as a mind-independent ethical reality, rather than being composed by the opinions of a divine creator, or sets of social conventions and mutually shared sentiments. Cataloging the ways in which many of us tend to sort these views is ultimately a sociological enterprise, but one that reflects an appreciation for the metaphysical implications of important dimensions of our lives. The fact that we care about the metaphysical implications of our ethical beliefs, and organize an entire subdiscipline around them, shows that we do deeply care about issues of truthmaking. Hence, even if "realism" and "antirealism" are terms of art that ultimately reflect how *we* think about the metaphysical terrain of certain domains of thought, the issues that drive us to think about and assign these labels are still genuine and worth pursuing.

8.6 Scientific Realism

Finally I come to scientific realism. Here the application of my truthmaking approach is straightforward, and its superiority to earlier

[9] Parallel remarks apply to Crispin Wright's superassertibility-based view of ethical judgments (1992, 1995), as well as any other theorist who reduces or analyzes moral judgments into counterfactuals.

well-known views is clear. In Section 8.1 I critiqued the truth-first accounts of realism offered by Arthur Fine and Bas van Fraassen. Fine identifies realism in terms of *theories* of truth. First, he suggests that there is something held in common by scientific realists and antirealists, which he dubs the "natural ontological attitude." This attitude maintains 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). Crucially, this involves taking scientific results "into one's life as true" (1984b: 95–96). What separates the realist and antirealist, then, is what theories of truth they subscribe to. Realists adopt a correspondence-style account, whereas antirealists adopt an epistemic-style account. Fine's preferred "nonrealist" simply refuses to take on a theory of truth, and thereby avoids engaging the realism debate at all.

I believe that Fine's account fails for a number of reasons.[10] First, it fails to describe the actual debate in the philosophy of science. Antirealists like van Fraassen do not accept epistemic theories of truth. Van Fraassen himself initially expresses sympathy with the correspondence theory of truth (1980: 197), though later he prefers a deflationary theory of truth (2008: 249).[11] Furthermore, it misidentifies the relevant dialectic in the philosophy of science. Realists and antirealists do not argue for their views by defending competing theories of truth. Instead, they deploy arguments such as the no-miracles argument (Smart 1963), pessimistic induction (Laudan 1981), or the argument from underdetermination (van Fraassen 1980). *These* are the arguments used to defend or critique realism, not the arguments used to defend or critique the correspondence theory of truth. Finally, Fine suggests that antirealists can accept that the claims of contemporary scientific theories are literally true, and just as epistemically trustworthy as the verdicts given to us by ordinary sense experience. Again, this claim is not empirically adequate. Constructive empiricists are *agnostic* regarding the truth-values of scientific claims concerning unobservables. They give epistemic arguments for why believing in the truth of such claims is epistemically indefensible, or at least not mandatory. The realism debate that Fine's account describes is not the actual debate in the philosophy of science.

Van Fraassen's definition of realism is better, but still insufficient. For van Fraassen, to be a realist about a certain theory is to believe in the literal

[10] I develop these criticisms further in Asay 2013c and Asay 2018b.

[11] I criticize the ability of constructive empiricists to embrace deflationary theories of truth in Asay 2009.

truth of the theory. In effect, he points to condition (i) of my account. But the other conditions are crucial: one can believe in the truth of a theory while at the same time supposing it to be ontologically grounded by something that clearly indicates idealism or some other form of antirealism. My suspicion is that van Fraassen thinks that requiring a *literal* understanding of scientific theories is sufficient for ruling out such theories as being antirealist. Suppose, for instance, that one took <There are electrons> to be made true by certain sense data arising in the minds of scientists who are observing a cloud chamber. Van Fraassen presumably believes that such a theorist thinks something along the lines that "There are electrons" can be replaced by some sort of operationalist reading that doesn't involve any actual electrons, and so in accepting the truth of "There are electrons" they are not accepting the truth of its literal meaning. This may be correct, but I believe we can make the same point by setting aside issues about semantics altogether. Regardless of what it is to literally or figuratively interpret the meaning of "There are electrons," what matters at the end of the day is what makes it true, if it is true. If the truthmaker is of an antirealism-relevant variety then the account is antirealist. What matters, most fundamentally, for scientific realism is what makes scientific theories true, if they are true.

When considering scientific theories, what sort of ontology qualifies as being relevant to realism? Here I think the answer is simply the familiar one. As Arthur Fine writes, "Any student in a freshman philosophy course knows that realism is a metaphysical doctrine. It asserts the existence of a real, external world" (2001: 120). Putnam, following Dummett, suggests that scientific realism is the view 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." (Putnam 1975: 70; see also Wright 1986: 253 and 1992: 158–159). Ontologies that don't fit realism are idealist ones that locate all the truthmakers in the mind (as Putnam suggests). I would also add ontologies that are too dependent upon the course of human events: here I have in mind Latour's (1998) perplexing if not paradoxical suggestion that the tuberculosis bacillus didn't exist until it was discovered. Views that "rewrite" claims about unobservables into claims about solely observable objects also easily qualify as antirealist on my view: they are antirealist with respect to *unobservable entities*, as no unobservable entities are posited to make true scientific theories. Though constructive empiricists may accept that there

could be unobservable entities, they accept the truth of no claims that are committed to them, and thereby earn their antirealism by not accepting any ontological commitment to unobservable entities.

As for Fine, his supposed "nonrealist" position faces a dilemma. We know that Fine accepts the truth of many standard scientific claims, such as <There are electrons> and <There are DNA molecules>. He accepts these, just as he accepts claims like <There are mountains in Washington> and <Chicago has a lakeside>. If his natural ontological attitude requires that he believe in a realism-relevant ontology to ground them – an ontology including electrons, DNA molecules, mountains, lakes, etc. – then it appears to be nothing more than a realist view (cf. Musgrave 1989). Fine might protest that what separates his view from realism is "a desk-thumping, foot-stamping shout of 'Really!'," but this is just empty rhetoric (1984b: 97). There is no difference between being true and being really true, and thumps – even when paired with shouts – do not add cognitive content to our utterances. If his natural ontological attitude is to genuinely stay above the fray, it must commit to no ontology whatsoever – not one that would lead to realism, and not one that would lead to antirealism. This is the second horn of the dilemma. For instance, Fine could simply stay neutral on what makes true <There are electrons> and <There are DNA molecules>. Now he might have a legitimate claim to having avoided realism and antirealism and their ontological stances, but at the cost of what is now an ontologically irresponsible view. In fact, it's the very sort of view that truthmaker theory is designed to challenge. If one accepts the truth of <There are electrons>, one ought to make sure one's ontology is properly aligned to it. To accept the truth of such claims but not accept anything in one's ontology is to fail to do one's ontological accounting. Presumably one shouldn't take <There are electrons> to be something that can be true in spite of no electrons belonging to one's ontology. But if Fine stays silent, he's simply shirking his cognitive responsibility to keep his beliefs and ontology properly aligned. Yes, doing so enables him to stay "neutral" on a particular debate in philosophy. But staying neutral in this case is no virtue.

Other familiar views in the philosophy of science (structural realism, entity realism, etc.) can seamlessly be integrated into my account, though I need not belabor the details here. (See Asay [2013c] for further discussion.) One general idea that I hope comes across is that realism debates, such as those found in metaethics and the philosophy of science, need not be concerned with highfalutin metaphysics that should instantly turn off

those with preferences for desert landscapes. Taking realism seriously goes hand in hand with being ontologically responsible in one's worldview. Ontological accountability is something that everyone needs to respect, and engaging in that enterprise *is* engaging the questions relevant to realism and antirealism. As a result, there is no virtue to be found in "leaving the debate behind," or "transcending" or "deconstructing" it, as some might claim (e.g., Blackburn 2002). Realism debates are here to stay, and that shouldn't bother anyone who takes ontology seriously.

PART III

Metaphysics

CHAPTER 9

Nominalism

In this third and final part of the book, I take up a variety of specific metaphysical issues. The topic of this chapter is nominalism, which has long been of paramount interest to truthmaker theorists. A familiar view is that truthmaking is in tension with nominalism: to accept an ontology of truthmakers is to reject the austere metaphysical worldview of the nominalist. It's probably fair to say that the majority of truthmaker theorists with a stake in the debate do put their theories to work in arguing against nominalism, but there is nothing inherently antinominalist in the idea of truthmaking (*contra*, e.g., Cameron 2008a: 417). As I've argued, the notion of truthmaking is ontologically neutral, and so in principle compatible with any ontological worldview. Nevertheless, leading advocates of truthmaking (most notably Armstrong) have put their theories to the task of arguing against nominalism. Given that my own sympathies lie on the nominalist side of the debate, I am interested in exploring how strong a truthmaking-based defense the nominalist can wield. Though a decent case can be made in favor of those nominalist inclinations, I ultimately conclude that they should be resisted.

In this chapter, I briefly present an overview of the various theoretical options available when it comes to realism and nominalism in the context of truthmaking. In so doing, I introduce my own distinction between *hard road* and *easy road* forms of nominalism. I then aim to give the best possible defense of these different forms of nominalism, but raise my own objections against them. Ultimately, I suggest that truthmaker theory is best served by a realist commitment to properties, whether in terms of universals or tropes.

9.1 The Terrain

In what follows, I shall borrow and then build upon Armstrong's (1989c, 1997) dialectical structure of the realism/nominalism debate. The "realist"

in this debate is the realist about universals. Universals here are objects that can, in principle, exist in multiple particulars. Universals play their role in the theory of properties, in the attempt to make sense of how different objects can yet be the same. Two atoms of gold share many of the same properties, and the realist about universals understands this claim literally: the two distinct atoms share a property when they both instantiate one and the same universal. Realism about universals therefore typically involves a dualist metaphysics: there are particulars, whose job it is to instantiate, and universals, whose job it is to be instantiated. There are many debates within the realist camp: Where are universals located? Which properties correspond to universals? Can universals exist independently of their being instantiated? The answers to these questions will have ramifications for one's truthmaker theory. What makes it true – supposing it is true – that there are properties that *could* have been instantiated, but in fact never are? A "transcendent" universal that exists apart from its instantiation would do the trick here, unlike "immanent" universals that exist only if they are instantiated. As I am not at present defending realism about universals specifically, these topics will not be my concern.

Whereas the realist defends the reality of the universal (in addition, presumably, to the particular), the nominalist defends the reality of the particular alone, denying that anything in the universe can exist multiply instantiated. The nominalist is a monist: reality is exhausted by the particular. When two objects share a property, there is not some further object in which they both participate. Instead, the sharing of a property might just be joint membership within a class (Lewis 1983), brute resemblance between particulars (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002b), or the possession of similar tropes or "moments," i.e., particularized property instances (Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984). While nominalists are united in their rejection of universals, the ontological menu on offer within their camp is strikingly diverse. Some find an ontology of tropes just as problematic and inflationary as an ontology of universals. Others are happy to reduce properties to sets or classes, but still feel the urge to distinguish some sets and classes as being metaphysically privileged (Lewis 1983). At the extreme, the nominalist lives up to the name, suggesting that there is no metaphysical basis for our categorizations and claims of resemblance: there are just objects, and the names we bestow upon them.

The history of truthmaking is, in large part, a history of reflection on the divide between realism and nominalism. This fact accords with my basic outlook: to engage in thinking about truthmaking is to engage in ontological inquiry, inquiry into what exists. Nominalists and realists are

players within an ancient ontological debate; their debate is one among many that is usefully illuminated by the context of truthmaking.[1] As a result, many truthmaker theorists take sides on the realism/nominalism debate as they defend their preferred stance on what truthmakers there are. Particularly revealing is how contingent predications figure into truthmaking arguments. Suppose that <Jo is American> is true. This predication is only contingently true, as Jo might have been born elsewhere. Thus, Jo alone is no truthmaker for the claim, since Jo's existence fails to necessitate the truth of <Jo is American>. However, if there is something such as a trope that we might call "Jo's Americanness," then this object could serve as a truthmaker for <Jo is American>. For it's impossible for this trope to exist and Jo to fail to be an American. In this way, some truthmaker theorists (e.g., Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984 and Lowe 2007) advance the case for an ontology of tropes. Tropes not only answer the call for truthmakers, but provide an explanation for facts of resemblance. Jo and Joe might both be Americans, and trope theorists account for this by directing our attention to the similarities between Jo's "Americanness" trope and Joe's. In this way, one form of nominalism is defended within the context of truthmaking.

Perhaps the most famous truthmaking argument, however, comes to the defense of realism. The argument originates in Armstrong, and I shall call it the *master argument* for realism. (Armstrong himself calls it the "truthmaker argument," and proclaims it to be, perhaps, the "fundamental argument" of his *A World of States of Affairs* [1997: 115].) In fact, it is an argument not just for the existence of universals, but for states of affairs as well, where states of affairs are objects non-mereologically composed by universals and particulars:

> Let it be the case that particular *a* instantiates universal F. *a* is F. Must there not be something about the world that makes it to be the case, that serves as an ontological ground, for this truth? . . . The truthmaker or ground cannot be *a*, at any rate if *a* is taken as the thin particular, the particular apart from its properties. Can it be the pair of *a* and F? This is getting a little warmer. But what appears to be the decisive argument against this suggestion is that it is possible that *a* and F should both exist and yet *a* not be F. F may be instantiated elsewhere. . . . We are asking what in the world will ensure, make true, underlie, serve as the ontological ground for, the truth that *a* is F. The obvious candidate seems to be the state of affairs of *a's being F*. In this state of affairs (fact, circumstance) *a* and F are brought together. (1997: 115–116)

[1] Cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2000, 2002a, 2002b), who argues that the "problem of universals" (or at least one such problem within the family of related puzzles) is best regimented in terms of truthmaking.

When it comes to accidental predications, particulars themselves do not guarantee the truth of the predication in question; otherwise, the predication wouldn't be accidental. Nor do the particular and universal in question, taken together as a mereological sum, guarantee the truth in question. The particular and universal need to be bound together in order to guarantee that *a* is F, and so Armstrong concludes that states of affairs exist: they are needed if we are to have truthmakers for accidental predications.

As already seen, of course, there are nominalist positions that challenge the soundness of Armstrong's argument. Nontransferable tropes also provide necessitating truthmakers. Defenses of even more austere forms of nominalism have been attempted. Josh Parsons (1999) has challenged Armstrong's argument, but in so doing rejects necessitation as a necessary condition of truthmaking. Parsons allows *a* itself to be a truthmaker for <*a* is F> because his account of the truthmaking relation allows for nonnecessitating truthmaking. I have argued in favor of a necessitating understanding of truthmaking, so I cannot accept Parsons' attempt at squaring nominalism and truthmaking.

I propose dividing the nominalist landscape into three groups. First is the camp that sees the need for entities such as tropes to play a role in the theory of properties. In the context of truthmaking, this brand of nominalism shares much in common with realists such as Armstrong. Both, after all, are "realists" about properties in the sense that they take properties to be genuine entities distinct from the entities that possess them. Many nominalists find trope theories still too ontologically profligate, and such opponents will be my focus in the rest of the chapter. Armstrong refers to trope nominalism as being "moderate," and dubs forms of nominalism that reject tropes "extreme." Moderate nominalism has a longstanding place in truthmaker theory, and the internal disputes between moderate nominalism and realism about universals will not be my present concern. Less often discussed or even noticed are the prospects for extreme nominalism to join the truthmaking bandwagon. Though I am ultimately critical of these views' ability to perform sound ontological accounting, I think they deserve a better hearing than they have heretofore received.

So the next two divisions within nominalism concern its "extreme" factions. The second brand of nominalism is what I shall call *easy road* nominalism. Easy road nominalism is the view that offers truthmakers for contingent predications, but without taking on a commitment to tropes, universals, or states of affairs. This view accepts the challenge of proper

ontological accounting, and attempts to meet it on an austere, nominalistically respectable basis. It is to be contrasted with *hard road* nominalism, the third kind of nominalism, which rejects the demand to find truthmakers for contingent predications. Hard roaders embrace their nominalist ontology, and reject the suggestion that by refusing to offer truthmakers for contingent predications, they are thereby committing some kind of ontological error. I borrow the language of the easy and hard roads from my work on presentism with Sam Baron (2014). Easy road presentists offer truthmakers for claims about the past; hard road presentists reject the call to look for them. I believe a similar dialectical context exists for contingent predications, and so I find the structural analogy illuminating. I return to the easy and hard roads to presentism in Chapter 10. I now turn to what I take to be the two strongest forms of easy road nominalism.

9.2 Easy Road Nominalism

Easy road nominalism is so called because it faces no difficulties justifying its claim to ontological accountability. That is to say, even if the ontological grounds it offers are ultimately unsatisfying, the intent is clearly in line with the call for ontological honesty. An ontological need is detected – what makes contingent predications true? – and then an answer is provided. In this section I first present David Lewis's easy road nominalist view, and then offer my own, which I take to be superior.

The best-known easy road view is due to David Lewis (2003) and Gideon Rosen (Lewis and Rosen 2003). In earlier work, Lewis argued for treating accidental predications as truthmaker gaps (1992, 2001b). He defended a "weak" supervenience principle of truth on being to the effect that had some true proposition been false, then either the world's ontology would have been different, or there would have been some difference in what fundamental relations those objects stood in, or what fundamental properties they possessed. Any change in truth-value, in other words, must correlate with some difference in the world, which for Lewis includes the facts both about what exists, and what properties and relations objects enjoy. (By contrast, Armstrong and Bigelow agree that truth supervenes on being, but maintain that any difference in truth must correlate solely with a difference in what exists.) In his later paper, however, Lewis considers the case for finding nominalistically friendly truthmakers for accidental predications, albeit one that commits to his views on counterpart theory. (I return to Lewis's earlier view in the context of hard road nominalism.)

Lewis's proposal is as follows. Most truthmaker theorists accept that states of affairs and tropes are not called for when it comes to essential predications. If Socrates is essentially human, then the existence of Socrates necessitates the truth of <Socrates is human>. Now, since Lewis is a modal realist, he handles the issue of essential properties with care. Socrates exists only in the actual world, and so it's trivial that in every world in which Socrates exists (i.e., the actual world and no other), he's human. It's also true that in every world in which Socrates exists, he's a philosopher. To restore the substance to judgments about essences, Lewis employs counterpart theory. What it is for Socrates to be essentially human is for Socrates and each of his counterparts in other possible worlds to be human. Normally, we think of Socrates in such a way that his origin is essential to him. Thus, Socrates couldn't have been a donkey, because all of his counterparts are human. But we can think about Socrates in other ways. We can think about Socrates *qua* philosopher. What this means is that we think about Socrates with respect to a counterpart relation that relates him only to philosophers. Socrates *qua* philosopher *is* essentially a philosopher, since all of his counterparts are philosophers. Hence Socrates *qua* philosopher is a suitable truthmaker for <Socrates is a philosopher>, since in every possible world in which one of Socrates *qua* philosopher's counterparts exists, <Socrates is a philosopher> is true. But, Lewis maintains, Socrates *qua* philosopher is identical to Socrates, and so the nominalist need only embrace counterpart theory, and not an ontology of tropes, in order to undermine Armstrong's master argument. Truthmakers for accidental predications are offered, but no compromise to nominalist metaphysics is required. (Lewis and Rosen then extend this analysis to provide truthmakers for negative existentials as well.)

My own suggestion for easy road nominalism aims to avoid commitment to Lewis's controversial modal metaphysics.[2] Like Lewis's view, it motivates a very strong form of nominalism, one that rejects the existence of not only universals, but tropes as well. To begin, consider again the rationale behind Armstrong's master argument. His case for states of affairs turns on the need for the right sort of ontological ground for accidental predications. If Socrates is contingently Greek, then he does not necessitate the truth of <Socrates is Greek>. Nor would Socrates necessitate the truth in mereological conjunction with a universal *being Greek* (supposing there is such a thing). So, Armstrong reasons, there needs to be something in the

[2] I first considered this argument in Asay 2013d.

world that exists as a binding of the two, and hence he makes his case for an ontology of states of affairs. Essential predications, by contrast, offer no support to Armstrong's cause. Given that Socrates is essentially human, no state of affairs is called for when it comes to <Socrates is human>, since Socrates himself necessitates its truth.

One way to begin considering my proposal is to ask: What if all predications were essential? If they were, then the antinominalist receives no ammunition from the case of accidental predications. If all properties were held essentially, then the individuals that bear those properties would be sufficient ontological grounds for all predications. Now, my proposal is not that all predications should be interpreted essentially. Rather, my proposal is that all accidental predications can be correlated with essential predications with which they are metaphysically equivalent. Those correlations may then be exploited to further the cause of easy road nominalism.

Let's consider some object O that has essential properties e_1 and e_2 and accidental properties a_1, a_2, and a_3.[3] According to standard thinking in truthmaker theory, O is a truthmaker for <O is e_1> and <O is e_2>, but not for <O is a_1>, <O is a_2>, and <O is a_3>. This follows from my own account of truthmaking as well, which maintains that necessitation is necessary and sufficient for truthmaking. What I have presented in the case of O is its "modal profile" – I have stipulated which of its (sparse) properties are essential, and which accidental. In so doing, I have offered instructions on how to think counterfactually about O. O could have failed to be a_1, though it could not have failed to be e_1. Anything that isn't e_2 couldn't be O, though O might never have been a_3. Next consider a different object, O*. O* is such that it must have all the same properties of O, except that they have different modal profiles: O* bears a_3 essentially, not accidentally like O does. Otherwise O and O* are, by definition, exactly the same: they are even co-located. Hence, whereas <O is a_3> is accidental, <O* is a_3> is essential. O does not necessitate the truth of <O is a_3>. However, O* does. O* is essentially a_3, and if O* exists, so does O. But: O* is a_3 if and only if O is a_3. Thus, the existence of O* guarantees that <O is a_3> is true. By my lights, that makes O* a truthmaker for <O is a_3>.

Let me present the case more concretely. Suppose, in addition to Socrates, there is another object named "Philocrates." Philocrates is exactly like Socrates – he shares all the same properties, including his various

[3] In what follows, the properties in question should be assumed to be sparse.

locations in spacetime – except that he has a different modal profile.[4] Being a philosopher is an essential property of Philocrates, whereas it is merely accidental for Socrates. Philocrates and Socrates coexist, and they always share the same properties – they differ simply in whether some of those properties are borne essentially or accidentally. Philocrates is essentially a philosopher, so if he exists at all, <Philocrates is a philosopher> is true. But, of metaphysical necessity, Philocrates is a philosopher if and only if Socrates is a philosopher. (Philocrates and Socrates, by definition, share all the same nonmodal properties.) So if Philocrates exists, <Socrates is a philosopher> is true. This is the sense in which any accidental predication (e.g., <Socrates is a philosopher>) correlates with some essential predication (e.g., <Philocrates is a philosopher>) to which it is metaphysically equivalent.

The costs and benefits of this proposal are clear. The benefit is that it provides what appear to be nominalistically acceptable truthmakers for contingent predications. Philocrates is not a trope or state of affairs. He is a person just like Socrates.[5] But, unlike Socrates, he necessitates the truth of <Socrates is a philosopher>. Thus, he is a truthmaker for <Socrates is a philosopher>, given my account of the truthmaking relation. However, I think it is plausible that other, logically stronger accounts of the truthmaking relation can agree with me on this thesis. For example, on many accounts truths must be *about* or *relevant* to their truthmakers, in addition to being necessitated by them. So it might be thought that Philocrates fails to be a truthmaker for <Socrates is a philosopher> in spite of necessitating it, since the claim is about Socrates, not Philocrates. Still, Socrates and Philocrates are intimately connected to one another – metaphysically necessarily so – and so they clearly are relevant to each other's existence. For instance, they are constituted by the very same collection of particles. The relationship between Philocrates and truths about Socrates is not similar to, say, the relationship between Socrates and the truths of arithmetic. The latter cases of necessitation are those that motivate strengthening the truthmaking relation beyond necessitation, and it is my contention that the case with Socrates and Philocrates is not that similar. So it's at least open to advocates of a strengthened truthmaking relation to accept my proposal.

[4] How exactly this claim is cashed out will turn on one's views about temporal parts, presentism, endurantism, and the like. At present I remain neutral on such issues.

[5] Unless, I suppose, it is essential to being a person that persons are not essentially philosophers. In that case, Philocrates is not a person, and we don't have a word for the kind of thing he is.

The cost, of course, is the ontological commitment to Philocrates. And it's not just Philocrates. There is also Greekocrates, who is just like Socrates but essentially Greek, and plenty of others.[6] What I have presented is a kind of *plenitude* thesis. It basically states that for any object we countenance, there are other objects corresponding to the original that differ only in their modal profile. To take a simple case, suppose some object has two properties, *p* and *q*. This pair of properties corresponds to four modal profiles: one in which neither is essential, one in which both are essential, and two in which one but not the other is essential. The idea behind plenitude is that, ontologically speaking, we *already* have four objects that fit each of the possible modal profiles. None of these four is in any sense the fundamental one, from which the others are derived. That we usually attend and refer to only one of them calls for a pragmatic or sociological explanation, not a metaphysical one.

I do not deny that the view might sound extravagant. There are some things to be said on behalf of its modesty, however. For one thing, one might take the "new" objects to be supervenient upon the "original" ones (and vice versa). In this way, the view could be seen as analogous to mereological universalism, the view that any mereological sum of existing objects itself exists. We don't usually speak of the sum of Socrates and the first printing of *Charlotte's Web*, but it exists nevertheless, according to the universalist. The advantage of this view is that the universalist does not need to draw a line between those mereological sums that exist and those that don't. Likewise, the plenitude theorist needn't decide which of the modal profiles is really satisfied and which go wanting. The alternative to plenitude seems to presuppose that there are "modal joints" in nature: of all the possible modal profiles that correspond to some object's properties, one is privileged. In the case of Socrates, this is the one that selects *being human* as essential and *being a philosopher* as accidental. This view, I'm inclined to say, makes our knowledge of essential properties a miracle. To see why, consider a debate between someone who believes only in Socrates, and someone who believes only in Philocrates. There is much they disagree on. One believes in something that is essentially a philosopher, and one believes in something that is accidentally a philosopher. Where might they turn to settle the dispute? If we double down on the claim that Socrates alone exists, this suggests that we must somehow know that the object in question's possession of *being a philosopher* is an accidental matter. And how do we know that? One might say: because if the object in question

[6] Bennett calls the view "bazillion-thingism" (2004).

ceased being a philosopher, it would still exist. Thus, it can't be Philocrates. But this just begs the question. If Philocrates ceased being a philosopher, he would cease to exist. Something might exist in its place, but it wouldn't be Philocrates.[7]

Secondly, the view earns one kind of parsimony, albeit at the expense of another. The motivation behind plenitude is that a nominalist world of particulars can provide truthmakers for accidental predications. In fact, it doesn't even need the trope theorist's bifurcation between ordinary particulars and tropes. In this way, the dualist metaphysics of particular plus universal (or ordinary particular plus trope) is avoided. Indeed, it comes at the cost of *more* particulars, but that is a small price to pay when it enables greater theoretical economy. (This is the same argument that Lewis [1986: 4], for example, uses to downplay the costs of his infinitely many possible worlds.) In effect, the plenitude theorist has more particulars, but fewer ontological kinds, which is plausibly the preferable view from the perspective of theoretical parsimony.

Finally, I believe there is independent support for the view to be found in a familiar corner of philosophy. Take the ancient puzzle of the statue and the clay. Consider, in particular, the case where the statue and clay coexist, as when two distinct lumps of clay are brought together to form a statue (Gibbard 1975). What is the relationship between the statue, Goliath, and the lump of clay that constitutes it, Lumpl? According to Gibbard, it is one of contingent identity. Lumpl and Goliath are one and the same, although they needn't have been. A basic objection to this view is that they don't share the same properties, and so can't be identical. (Perhaps Leibniz's Law is appealed to here.) Gibbard works around this objection by adopting some controversial views about what does or doesn't count as a property. For my purposes, consider the alternative view that Goliath and Lumpl are distinct, and share all their nonmodal properties, which is to say that they enjoy different modal profiles. Goliath could not survive a squishing, though Lumpl could. This perspective need not countenance the puzzling commitment to contingent identity, or its *prima facie* rejection of Leibniz's Law. It also highlights the kind of case where modal profiles are importantly salient. We don't normally need to distinguish Philocrates from Socrates, but that is no matter, metaphysically speaking. Philocrates and his modal profile are around, waiting to be identified by anyone who finds it useful to do so, just as Goliath and Lumpl are both present in the sculptor's studio, where the distinction is

[7] The claims here might need to be adjusted in terms of time-indexed properties or the like.

important to notice. Perhaps truthmaking is the right occasion to find utility in Philocrates and his friends.[8]

To conclude this section, let me compare my proposal with Lewis's view that relies on "*qua*" objects. On the surface, the views are similar. Socrates *qua* philosopher is essentially a philosopher, as is Philocrates. But there are crucial differences. First, Lewis maintains that Socrates *qua* philosopher *just is* Socrates. (Moreover, Socrates is identical to any Socrates *qua* what have you.) This is so, even though Socrates *qua* philosopher and, say, Socrates *qua* Greek differ in their (modal) properties. Lewis, therefore, must reject Leibniz's Law, here understood as either the idea that identical objects must share all the same properties, or that anything true of one must be true of the other. Second, my view requires no embrace of counterpart theory and its talk of possible worlds. Regardless of how one conceives of possible worlds, the counterpart theorist must take them seriously, and I find it best to avoid them altogether.

More, of course, needs to be said to defend the plenitude line. For example, Bennett – who examines the view in detail without endorsing it – presents it in the context of solving the "grounding problem" for essential properties (2004). In virtue of what is being a philosopher an essential property of Philocrates, though not of Socrates? Bennett presents the difficulty as one for those who believe in spatiotemporally coincident things like Philocrates and Socrates, but it's not clear that the problem – if it is one[9] – doesn't equally apply to those that believe only in Socrates. In virtue of what is being human essential to Socrates? The grounding problem, it seems to me, applies at most only to those who believe that only a proper subset of modal profiles are realized. For the plenitude theorist, there is no privileging of one modal profile over another: all are instantiated by coincident objects. Any cluster of properties constitutes a multitude of objects.

Regardless of how we approach the grounding problem, I have offered a truthmaker argument supporting plenitude. The fact that it provides nominalistically acceptable truthmakers is a vote in its favor. Of course, that consideration on its own is far from decisive. As Armstrong prudently

[8] It strikes me that the nominalist approach to truthmaking that Kriegel (2015) finds in the work of Brentano is remarkably similar to the proposal detailed here, and that I first articulated in Asay 2013d. See also Fine 1982.

[9] DeRosset (2011) questions the legitimacy of the grounding problem, and consequently recommends against committing to the plenitude of satisfied modal profiles. This argument depends on "bazillion-thingism" being motivated only by the desire to solve the grounding problem, which I am denying in this section. For a more sympathetic approach, see Einheuser 2011.

reminds us, there is no "royal road" in metaphysical inquiry, and truthmaker theory is no exception (2004: 4). Still, it provides the nominalist with a new argument for resisting realism about universals and tropes, even within a truthmaking context.

9.3 Parity

I begin this section with a confession. The plenitude argument, and its use in supporting easy road nominalism, might well involve some covert cheating. If so, it is not alone: it might be that realists and nominalists alike have been relying on a dubious presumption in their shared thought that underlies the master argument. That thought is that when it comes to essential predications, individuals alone are perfectly sufficient ontological grounds. Even Armstrong concedes that – nominalism is threatened only when it comes to accidental predications. In this section, I want to probe that line of thinking that is usually taken for granted by both sides of the realism/nominalism debate within truthmaker theory. I suspect it has been conceded far too quickly.

One way to question the traditional line is to consider the matter from the perspective of the antirealist about *de re* modality. The sort of antirealist I have in mind here isn't one who, like Quine (1961, 1966b), rejects the legitimacy of talk of essential and accidental properties. Rather, it is someone who, like Blackburn (1986) or Sidelle (1989), understands our talk of essences in line with expressivist or conventionalist perspectives. Briefly, the idea is that the distinction between essential and accidental predications is not so much a mind-independent matter regarding how things are in themselves, but rather a reflection of how we think and speak about the world. In calling Socrates essentially human, we place restrictions on how we think about him. We do not permit possibilities in which Socrates fails to be human, but we do permit possibilities in which he fails to be a philosopher. In this way, we enable and impose standards for our counterfactual and otherwise modal discourse regarding Socrates. But these decisions are not forced upon us by the world. We could have reasoned about Socrates in a way consistent with treating his humanity as being accidental; to do so would incur no mistake, as we would were we to judge, say, oxygen as being lighter than hydrogen.

From this antirealist perspective, the distinction between essential and accidental properties carries no substantive metaphysical weight. The distinction between them is a matter of convention, projection, or however else one understands the nature of our judgments about essences. As a

result, the antirealist should not draw the sort of ontological asymmetry that is invited by the truthmaking arguments of the previous sections. According to the standard view, accidental, but not essential, predications call for ontological additions. The tactic of the easy road nominalist (exploited by both Lewis and myself) is to, in effect, render all accidental predications essential. But this asymmetry should strike the antirealist as irrational: ontology should not be inflated or deflated due to convention or projection in this way. Choosing to add a state of affairs or trope to one's ontology here, but not there, because of human convention and projection is misguided.

The conclusion I draw is that the antirealist about *de re* modality should adopt *parity*, the thesis that accidental and essential predications require the same sort of ontological ground. If we need states of affairs or tropes for accidental predications, then we need them for essential predications. But the converse is true as well: if we don't need them for essential predications, we don't need them for accidental predications, either. Parity seems to sit well with easy road nominalism: by having a rich set of *qua* objects or objects satisfying all possible modal profiles, particulars alone can satisfy both accidental and essential predications. However, I believe that the call for ontological accountability that drives the easy road nominalist is not easily squared with the insight that drives the parity argument.

So far, my remarks on parity have come in the context of antirealism about essences. But I suspect that parity can be motivated independently of that view, and for this reason I believe it poses a challenge for easy road nominalism. So what should the realist about *de re* modality think as regards parity? Again, the standard view rejects it: only accidental predications require states of affairs or tropes, since their truth is not guaranteed by the objects themselves. Their argument is that Socrates, say, guarantees the truth of <Socrates is human>, so we don't need a state of affairs that brings Socrates and *being human* together. You can't have Socrates without Socrates being human. That's true. But why should this imply that we don't need universals like *being human*, and states of affairs involving them? An alternative view is that the existence of Socrates *already* presupposes the existence of such universals. You can't have Socrates without also having *being human*, and perhaps a state of affairs that joins them together. It's true that once you've committed to the existence of Socrates, you don't need to go on to commit yourself to a state of affairs of Socrates' being human. Yet that could be the case only because in committing to Socrates you already must be committing to such a state of affairs. On this view, when you sign up for Socrates, you sign up for a series of states of

affairs (or tropes) corresponding to his essence. In this way, parity is preserved. Ultimately, states of affairs or tropes ground the truth of all predications. It's just that some must be around any time the object is around, and some others don't need to be.

If this argument for parity is sound, then the easy road nominalist is in trouble. If nominalists accept that Socrates is a sufficient ontological ground for <Socrates is human>, then this is because they are already committed to a state of affairs or trope, undermining their (extreme) nominalism. The plenitude nominalist now has no advantage. Philocrates is no longer a nominalist freebie: he accompanies a trope or state of affairs that brings him together with *being a philosopher*, even if Socrates doesn't. Plenitude nominalists might seem to have taken the upper hand, but that is only because they are ignoring the antinominalist consequences that lurk behind our commitments to ordinary particulars.

The fundamental moral that I draw from the parity argument is that it is a mistake for anyone to conclude that particulars – at least understood in a way such that they are acceptable to nominalists – ever served as sufficient ontological grounds for essential predications. If particulars do serve as ontological grounds for essential predications, but do so independently of any properties hidden in the background, then the essential predications must be ontologically empty. It is, in effect, to say that <Socrates is human> can be true although Socrates and *being human* do not come together. The original idea, after all, is that finding truthmakers for <Socrates is human> does not compromise robust forms of nominalism; thus, we can have truthmakers for <Socrates is human> without any states of affairs or tropes regarding being human. The mistake with presuming that nominalists face no difficulties with essential predications, I'm suggesting, is thinking the wrong way about how certain predications "come for free." Some things come for free because they genuinely carry no ontological cost (or additional ontological cost). For example, suppose you have a truthmaker for <p>. In that case, you already have a truthmaker for <It is true that p> and <It is true that it is true that p> because adding "It is true that" to a sentence adds no content to it (Asay 2013a, 2013b). Or, perhaps more controversially, consider the property of being self-identical. One might think that there is no metaphysical basis for this case of property possession, since it is a matter of logical necessity and nothing else. Logical properties, in other words, do not motivate the call for universals and tropes. But *being human*, even when possessed essentially, is not a case of a logical property. Essential properties are not "free" in the way that logical properties might be. They may come "pre-installed"

with the objects that possess them, but that doesn't mean they carry no metaphysical weight. The operating system has to be installed on the hard drive, but that doesn't mean it takes up no disk space.

Consider again my toy example of object O that has essential properties e_1 and e_2 and accidental properties a_1, a_2, and a_3. Compare a universe with just O to a universe with just O*, which has the same properties but bears a_3 essentially. Here's the wrong conclusion to draw. The O universe requires three states of affairs and three universals, whereas the O* universe requires only two. The universal a_3, on this view, has no need for its existence in the O* world, even though <O* is a_3> is true there. Or consider the case of O**, which bears all five properties essentially. The ontology for O**'s universe includes no universals whatsoever. After all, O** by itself is a truthmaker for all the predications involving it. Or consider a mixed scenario, where O and O* both exist. Here we need a state of affairs to ground O's being a_3, but not one to ground O*'s being a_3. For those who take states of affairs seriously, these consequences should be unacceptable. To say that O* is a sufficient truthmaker for <O* is a_3> should not be taken to imply that O* and a_3 do not come together as a state of affairs. Rather, we should accept that O* is a truthmaker for <O* is a_3> precisely because O*'s existence implies the existence of states of affairs that bring it together with each of its essential properties.[10]

To sum up, what I'm arguing is that easy road nominalism begins from the supposed asymmetry between accidental and essential predications. It seems that essential predications "come for free" with the subjects of those predications; easy road nominalism then exploits this idea to find an essential predication to correlate with each accidental predication. The rationale behind parity, however, is that the predications come for free only because the properties are already accompanying the particulars, not because the properties are nothing, metaphysically speaking. Easy road nominalists find themselves in an awkward position as they start down the path of the realist, but then attempt to exit it and take a shortcut to ontological austerity. Parity suggests that the shortcut is no such thing: it stays on the path of taking properties ontologically seriously.

[10] Note that some, at this juncture, might draw the following conclusion: O* never was the truthmaker for its essential predications. <O* is a_3> is necessitated by O*, sure, but is really true in virtue of the state of affairs of O*'s being a_3. Because I believe that necessitation is sufficient for truthmaking, I need not deny that objects themselves are truthmakers for essential predications. The argument of this section is just that this fact is no aid for nominalists who seek to avoid an ontological commitment to states of affairs.

9.4 Hard Road Nominalism

Given my sympathies with nominalism, I offered the plenitude argument as a way of finding truthmakers for contingent predications in a nominalist universe. But the parity argument calls that thinking into question. Positing more individuals in the world doesn't get us away from realism if those individuals themselves require (because of their essences) the existence of tropes and universals already. At this point, the nominalist might offer the following line of thought. The parity argument is fundamentally sound. Accidental predications require states of affairs, universals, tropes, and the like if and only if essential predications do. This means that states of affairs theorists like Armstrong and trope theorists like Mulligan, Simons, and Smith are committed to more ontology than they perhaps initially thought. There are *being human* states of affairs and tropes, even if *being human* is only ever possessed essentially. These theorists concede both sides of the parity biconditionals. Thoroughgoing nominalists, by contrast, should maintain the biconditionals by denying both sides. They can still use parity to their advantage, as a means of undermining the call for an ontology specifically posited to ground the truth of predications. Their view is that it was always a mistake to look for grounding entities for predications – essential or accidental – which is fully consistent with parity.

I call this outlook "hard road nominalism" because it both takes a hardline stance on truthmaking – no truthmakers are needed for predications – and also because (I shall argue) it is a difficult position to maintain. The easy road nominalist shares the accountability instinct of the anti-nominalist, and tries to satisfy it. The hard road nominalist thinks the call for ontological accounting here is misplaced, or overinterpreted.

Armstrong (1978, 1980) famously dubbed this general form of nominalism "ostrich nominalism," on account of his belief that these sorts of metaphysicians refuse to face the ontological task at hand, and instead bury their heads in the sand.[11] Suppose that <*a* is *F*> is true. According to Michael Devitt – who hopes to turn Armstrong's critique against him – "we have nothing to say about what makes *a F*, it just *is F*; that is a basic and inexplicable fact about the universe" (1980: 436). In a truthmaking context, this sort of claim can seem shocking. Suppose we're talking about a yellow lemon. Is <The lemon is yellow> really a good

[11] Armstrong has Quine in mind, but see Pickel and Mantegani (2012) for an argument that Quineans can and should side with Armstrong here. See also Goff's discussion of "metaphysical primitivism" (2006).

candidate for being a basic and inexplicable fact about the universe? This claim has plausible and implausible readings.[12] Surely there are all sorts of explanations we could give for this truth, which involve the physical properties of the fruit (perhaps in tandem with facts about lighting conditions, our visual systems, etc.). So if "inexplicable fact" means there is no explanation of any sort available, then Devitt's claim is false. If he means, however, that it is brute in the sense of it not having a truthmaker, the view is more plausible. Lots of people take it not to have a truthmaker – David Lewis (1992, 1998, 2001b), for instance. If they are to be sensible, those who share Devitt's outlook had better not say that <The lemon is yellow> has zero implications for ontology; that would be to suggest that it could be true regardless of what exists in the world, in which case its truth wouldn't even supervene on being. Instead, the ostrich should say that although <The lemon is yellow> has no truthmaker – there is no object (such as a state of affairs or a trope) whose existence necessitates that the lemon is yellow – it does nevertheless have ontological implications. Those who believe it to be true had better have a yellow lemon in their ontology. The ostrich will then point out that while the nominalist is committed to a yellow lemon, the realist is committed both to the yellow lemon and also something like a state of affairs that ties together the lemon with the universal *being yellow*. In this way, the ostrich nominalist earns a leaner ontology.[13]

This sort of thinking resurfaces in the arguments of the philosophers I identified earlier as truthmaking "deflationists" (in Section 5.3). Their main idea is that the ambitions of truthmaker theory can be settled without recourse to truthmakers.[14] In its most extreme version, this attitude claims that so long as <*p*> is true because *p*, we have all the "truthmaking" we need. But since it's always the case that <*p*> is true because *p*, there is no substantive program of truthmaking. It's not difficult to hear echoes of Devitt's claim here that there is nothing needed to ground the truth of <*a* is *F*> above and beyond an acceptance that *a* is *F*. Again, this can be read in a shockingly implausible vein: so long as we commit to it being the case that *p*, that *q*, that *r*, and the like, the project of truthmaking is complete (when, of course, the project hasn't even begun).

[12] To be fair, Devitt has in mind cases where the predicate in question is a fundamental one.

[13] See, however, Pickel and Mantegani (2012) for an intriguing inversion of the usual parsimony arguments in the realism/nominalism debate.

[14] Hence, see the titles of Hornsby's "Truth without Truthmaking Entities" (2005), Melia's "Truthmaking without Truthmakers" (2005), Schnieder's "Truth-making without Truth-makers" (2006b), and Rychter's "Truthmaker Theory without Truthmakers" (2014).

The more sensible path to take is that while there may be no more to the "truth" of <*p*> than that *p*, it remains an open question what the ontological grounds of <*p*> are. However, this is to investigate questions about truthmaking, not dismiss them.

As for <The lemon is yellow>, then, the ostrich nominalist argues that when it comes to ontology building, all we need is a yellow lemon. No trope, no fact, no state of affairs; just a yellow lemon. Although the nominalist seems to have a straightforward parsimony argument here, matters are more complicated, and deserve a deeper look. In order to properly frame the present dispute between the hard road nominalist and the realist (or trope theorist), it will be useful to return to the distinction between two well-known theses in the truthmaking literature (see again Section 4.1). These are the supervenience theses that have been defended by John Bigelow (1988), David Lewis (1992, 2001b), and others (e.g., Simons 2010). Both theses are defended as alternatives to truthmaker maximalism. On Bigelow's view, which I have called *strong supervenience*, what is true supervenes upon what exists. From this principle alone, it doesn't follow that truthmakers for negative existentials exist. The truth of <Unicorns don't exist> supervenes on what exists, in the sense that had the proposition been false, then the stock of existents in the world would have been different. Had it been false, then unicorns would reside in the world's ontological inventory. For Bigelow, this is "truthmaking" enough for negative existentials: though nothing necessitates their truth, their truth is still properly grounded in the world. Lewis introduces a less strong claim, which I call *weak supervenience*. According to this principle, what is true supervenes upon both what exists and "how" things exist. That is to say, had any truth failed to be true, then *either* the world's ontology would have been different, *or* there would have been a different distribution of properties and relations among the objects that exist. From this principle it doesn't follow that accidental predications need truthmakers. Had <Socrates is a philosopher> failed to be true, then either the world would have had a different ontology (without Socrates), or the world would have had the same ontology, but the objects within it would have had some difference in what properties they bore and what relations they stood in. And that's the case here: had <Socrates is a philosopher> failed to be true, then either Socrates wouldn't exist, or he would have existed but with a different set of properties and relations. For Lewis (at least in his 2001b), adherence to the weak supervenience principle and the nonmaximalism it allows is "truthmaking" enough.

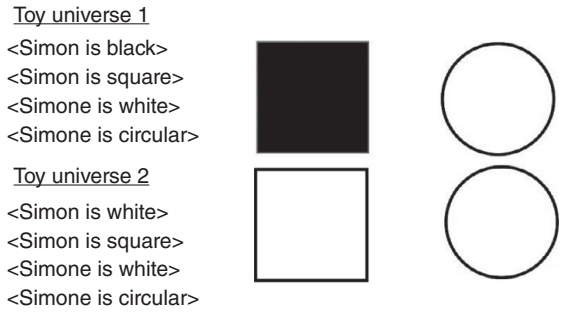


Figure 9.1 Simone and Simon

The straightforward difference between Bigelow's strong supervenience principle and Lewis's weak supervenience principle masks, to my mind, a far deeper metaphysical difference. In Bigelow's picture, sets of possibilities with identical ontologies are indiscernible. Fixing the ontology, in other words, fixes what is true. For Lewis, this isn't so. Two sets of possibilities could include the same ontology, but yet be discernible. To illustrate, consider the two following toy universes. In one universe, there is Simon the black square and Simone the white circle. Let's suppose their shapes are essential to them, but their colors accidental. In the other universe, Simon is a white square, and Simone a white circle (Figure 9.1).

On Lewis's view, these two universes have the same ontology, consisting of Simon and Simone. They differ not in terms of what exists, but only in terms of what properties the occupants possess (see also Dodd 2002a: 74). Bigelow sees the worlds differently. Something is true in one universe (<Simon is black>) that is false in the other. If so, something must exist in one of the worlds that doesn't exist in the other. Let's say that something is a trope. The best way to describe the first toy universe is as including Simon, Simone, and at least two tropes – one for Simon's blackness and one for Simone's whiteness. (I'm setting aside for the moment the parity argument that suggests essential predications need tropes or states of affairs as well.) Simon's whiteness trope doesn't exist in the second universe, and that's how the trope-based ontology conforms to the strong supervenience principle.

At first glance, then, Lewis's ontology is more parsimonious. The ontology for both universes includes just two things, Simon and Simone, whereas on Bigelow's view the universes include Simon, Simone, and two tropes. There are some initial complications – perhaps the trope theorist is

a bundle theorist, and there is nothing to "Simon" and "Simone" above and beyond their tropes – but for the moment it at least seems like the trope theorist dreams up more for the universes than does the Lewisian nominalist. However, this way of accounting favors the Lewisian only by impoverishing the role of ontology in the debate. What I mean here returns to the point just made about how ontology, on Bigelow's view, "fixes" the way of the world. When a strong supervenience theorist presents a comprehensive ontology, questions about what is true and what is false are settled.[15] If the ontology is given by {Simon, Simone, $Black_{\text{Simon}}$, $White_{\text{Simone}}$}, then it follows that <Simon is black> and <Simone is white> are both true. If the ontology is given only by {Simon, Simone}, however, then we don't yet know about the contingent features of the world. We might know that Simon is square and Simone circular (assuming that essences "come along" with their bearers as a matter of necessity), but we don't know their colors. Yet – and here's the crucial point – accounting for the accidental features of the universe is indispensable to the overall project of metaphysics. This follows from the basic premise of truthmaking: using the facts about what is true and what is false as a guide to answering metaphysical questions about what composes the world. Truthmaker theorists pursue metaphysics by uncovering the ontological grounds for all that is true. For maximalists and strong supervenience theorists, the project of giving an ontology serves this goal all by itself. Tell me what there is, and you tell me what's true. For weak supervenience theorists, this ambition is abandoned. Even after you tell me what there is, infinitely many facts about what's true and false are left unsettled. To "finish" the metaphysical project, we have to go beyond ontology, and add another component to our metaphysical investigations. Cognitive accounting must be bifurcated.

The upshot is that the familiar parsimony argument between advocates of weak and strong supervenience is not so simple. Yes, the ontology of the weak supervenience theorist is leaner. But it does far less work. One way to put the point is that for weak supervenience theorists, the stock of

[15] Note that the maximalist might call foul here. It's true in toy universe 1 that there are exactly two individuals. It might be thought that the strong supervenience ontology doesn't fix that truth because the ontology, summed together, doesn't necessitate it. There could be a third universe with black Simon, white Simone, and gray Simeon. Still, it's implied in the idea of "offering a comprehensive ontology" that one is giving an account of *all* there is; the dispute between the maximalist and the strong supervenience theorist is whether that "allness" is itself a further entity. That's a debate worth having, and one on which I've taken a stand (Section 4.2). But it's a debate where both sides are united against the ostrich regarding the role of ontology, as being discussed presently.

truthmakers by themselves don't offer ontological grounds for all that is true. The idea behind weak supervenience, after all, is that what is true supervenes on *what* there is and *how* those things are. To offer a full metaphysical picture, then, there are two basic metaphysical tasks. One must come up with an account of what exists, and also an account of what properties those things have (and what relations they stand in). The second project is not reducible to the first, and as such is a separate and equally fundamental task of metaphysics. Advocates of strong supervenience, by contrast, can maintain that there is only one basic task: giving a comprehensive account of what there is.[16]

One way to conceive of the difference between defenders of weak and strong supervenience is in terms of the metaphor of the "book of the world." Equipped with the ontology of the strong supervenience theorist, one can write most (if not all) of the book of the world. One will know which particular objects exist, and what properties they have, and what relations they stand in. But the book of the world written on the basis of the weak supervenience theorist's ontology is far shorter. It will tell us what exists, but very little about those things.

The idea I'm putting forward here is implicit in the debate between Armstrong and Devitt over ostrich nominalism. When it comes to predications, Devitt just accepts that they are basic facts. "Why be dissatisfied with this?" he asks. "Explanation must stop somewhere. What better place than with a fundamental physical fact of our world?" (1980: 436). To these questions truthmaker theorists have a familiar answer: facts – understood as truths, not truthmakers (lest Devitt be forced to concede his nominalism) – are terrible explanatory stopping grounds, at least in the context of ontology. We want to know what makes these claims true. If explanation could always stay at the level of truths, and never descend into truthmakers, then ontology is pointless. Who cares what objects *exist*, if *truths* can stand on their own?

What emerges is that (ostrich) nominalists are the true dualists in this debate. To give a full metaphysical picture of the world, there are two fundamentally different tasks to be pursued. The existence of objects is one metaphysical fundamental, and their possession of properties is another. In refusing to give truthmakers for accidental predications, weak supervenience theorists gain points for ontology, but lose points by adding primitive

[16] Similar and sympathetic discussion is found in Hofmann, who argues that Lewis's view "leads us into sacrificing the elegant and uniform account of being and into an un-unified duality of being which is no further explicable" (2006: 432).

predications into their overall metaphysical view. In effect, they must take truths about property possession as brute because they refuse to countenance the existence of properties. Proponents of strong supervenience and maximalism have no need for this theoretical dualism. Facts need not ever be taken as brute; property possession has an ontological basis, and the ontological costs in providing it are mollified by the savings in overall theoretical economy.

To sum up, my suggestion is that the best path forward for the hard road nominalist is to adopt something like Lewis's weak supervenience view. This allows the nominalist to claim that predications do not need truthmakers, but also to save face when it comes to questions of ontological accountability. The weak supervenience theorist must keep two separate accounting books: one documenting what there is, and one documenting how those things are. While this is an honest form of accounting, my charge is that the weak supervenience view commits to a strong form of theoretical dualism about metaphysics that is ultimately a disadvantage for the nominalist.

Lewis's intention in defending weak supervenience was to find a way to respect truthmaker theory that did not require the ontological commitments that accompany views like Armstrong's maximalism (which needs truthmakers for negative existentials) and Bigelow's strong supervenience (which needs truthmakers for accidental predications). His rhetorical strategy is to question whether those who posit truthmaker gaps in the case of negative existentials and accidental predications are really "companions in guilt" with those who posit truthmaker gaps for, say, truths about the past or counterfactual truths about possible experiences (Lewis 1992: 219). Though his point has force, it does ultimately rely on deflating the theoretical importance of ontology. The task of "offering an ontology," once one scales down one's truthmaker theory to weak supervenience, no longer fulfills the theoretical need to give a comprehensive account of the grounds for truths. In addition to that ontology, one must also take as fundamental all predications – or at least all atomic predications of fundamental properties and relations. To do the task of cognitive accounting – which I have argued to be the philosophical heart of truthmaker theory – the weak supervenience theorist cannot just offer an account of *what* there is. In addition, the theorist needs a separate ledger documenting *how* things are. Maximalists and strong supervenience theorists, by contrast, need just one set of books.

When it comes to "the big picture" – that is, a comprehensive metaphysical theory, the offering of which is a central goal of truthmaker

theory – truthmaker theorists who adopt maximalism or strong supervenience enjoy a crucial advantage. To be sure, they end up committed to more ontology than does the hard road nominalist, in virtue of their commitments to entities like tropes and states of affairs that make true accidental predications. But in so doing, they avoid taking the very facts of predication as fundamental. For these theorists, ontology, the project of saying what there is, answers the call as to what provides grounds for all that is true.

9.5 Conclusion

As I noted at the outset of this chapter, I am generally sympathetic toward nominalism. The approach to truthmaker theory advanced in these pages is motivated in large part by my hope that metaphysicians of all stripes can (and already are) playing the game of truthmaking, and I have sought to articulate a structure for truthmaker theory that invites all metaphysical parties to the table. To engage in truthmaker theory is not, in and of itself, to abandon nominalism. Even forms of "ostrich" nominalism can be seen as players in the truthmaking debate, especially if Lewis's nonmaximalist view that commits only to weak supervenience is understood as such.[17] But, of course, that many views can come to the same table does not mean that all the views are equally good. The upshot of this chapter is that strong forms of nominalism (that reject both universals and tropes) have some very specific defects when it comes to the project of giving an ontological accounting for truth. This is true for both easy road and hard road nominalism.

My strategy in this chapter has been to make the best case I can for nominalist-friendly truthmaking. That began with the plenitude argument, which presents one (easy road) way of finding truthmakers for accidental predications that doesn't rely on contentious entities such as universals, tropes, or states of affairs. I raised doubts for that argument by

[17] Not all theorists present Lewis as sympathetic to truthmaking, as I believe him to be. Drawing perhaps on MacBride (2005: 139), such theorists might take Lewis to "damn the truthmaker principle with faint praise." I believe it's incorrect to read Lewis's engagement with Armstrong's views on truthmaking for over a decade as a condemnation of the enterprise. Lewis, early on, was no fan of *maximalist* truthmaking, but one cannot interpret that as a rejection of truthmaking in general unless one brings to the analysis one's own (false) views about what does or doesn't count as respectable truthmaker theory. Lewis's work is a fertile source of possibility for truthmaker theory, as he takes pains to show which truthmaking theses one can or can't adopt, given one's other metaphysical commitments. See Bricker (2015) for a presentation of Lewis that paints him as being sympathetic toward truthmaker theory.

developing the parity thesis, which suggests that the asymmetry typically taken to hold between the kinds of truthmakers needed for accidental versus essential predications doesn't exist. Second, I hoped to further the nominalist cause by welcoming to the truthmaking table hard road views such as Lewis's weak supervenience account, which I interpret as an attempt at reconciling truthmaking and nominalism. (Theorists such as Dodd [2002a, 2007], however, write as if the weak supervenience view is a rejection of truthmaker theory.) The weak supervenience thesis attempts to confer ontological respectability onto accidental predications – it forbids the possibility of severing what is true from what exists and what properties those things enjoy – and this it accomplishes. But it does so at the cost of limiting what the project of ontology achieves. It introduces the need for a new kind of ontological accounting, one that, in essence, takes predication to be equally fundamental to existence. In this way, I have argued that it is nominalists, not realists, who commit to the kind of dualism that should most give us pause.

In many ways, this chapter tells a story that should be familiar to those well-versed in the ancient debate between realists and nominalists.[18] I see this as a virtue: truthmaker theory is not a *sui generis* branch of metaphysics, concerned with a set of questions left unanswered by other metaphysical inquiries. Rather, truthmaking is a way of *doing* metaphysics and exploring metaphysical questions. Hence, it is no surprise that the questions concerning the truthmakers for accidental and essential predications call to mind the same sorts of questions that have been investigated by realists and nominalists. A familiar summary of the realism/nominalism debate is that while the former view is less parsimonious, ontologically speaking, it earns more explanatory power than does the latter. That way of seeing things is consistent with the view I've presented. The truthmaker theorist who abandons extreme nominalism incurs an ontological cost – but the resulting ontology alone boasts the success of providing a comprehensive ontological account of all that is true. Extreme nominalists can still attempt to satisfy the ambitions of truthmaker theory. This is the easy road, but I fear that its gains in parsimony are ultimately illusory. Or they may reject the call for truthmakers, but still defend their claim to ontological accountability. In so doing, the hard road nominalist has to bifurcate the task of ontological accounting – we need the books both for what exists, and also for "how" they exist. This is one way of thinking

[18] This is not to suggest that the debate over the existence of properties is entirely about truthmaking and its concerns. See, e.g., van Inwagen 2004.

about the old charge of how nominalism lacks explanatory power: by taking how things are as equally fundamental with what things there are, we take more basic categories as metaphysical primitives. Realists about properties (whether in the form of tropes or universals) seek to account for truths about how things are with more investigation into what things there are, and in this way have a cleaner theoretical story to tell.

Of course, my arguments here only go so far. Our topic, at bottom, concerns what it is for an object to have a property, and that question is about as fundamental to metaphysics and philosophy as anything can be. I'm not convinced that thinking through ancient metaphysical puzzles via the tools of truthmaking will resolve them – I'm not convinced that fundamental metaphysical puzzles can ever be resolved. I do believe that viewing them through the lens of truthmaker theory can illuminate them, and help us to see their connection to other issues in philosophy. Although on balance this chapter poses greater difficulties for nominalism than realism, I hope to have identified the issues that, if resolved, would best help the case for nominalist truthmaking. But for the moment, anyway, I incline toward the view that favors the strong supervenience thesis, and the rejection of both easy and hard road nominalism that it entails. That, by itself, leaves many questions unsettled. Should one adopt trope nominalism, or go in for realism about universals? That question I leave for another day, but it is well trodden.[19] For the meantime, I shall rest content with the thesis that although more extreme forms of nominalism do not in and of themselves constitute a rejection of truthmaking, considerations that arise from truthmaking do strongly question their ultimate viability.

[19] For defenses of universals and states of affairs, see, e.g., Mellor 1995, Armstrong 1997 and 2004, Heathcote 2003, Cheyne and Pigden 2006, Hofmann 2006, Fumerton 2010, Jago 2018, and Meinertsen 2018. Englebretsen (2010) defends a truthmaking ontology of what he calls "facts," but for him these are properties, not universals bound to particulars. For defenses of tropes, see, among others, Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984, Smith and Brogaard 2000, Simons 2005, Cameron 2006, Lowe 2007 and 2009, Moltmann 2007, and Maurin 2010.

CHAPTER 10

Presentism

With perhaps the exception of negative existentials, truths about the past have caused more ink to be spilled on truthmaking than any other kind of truth. The basic thought is that presentists face a difficulty squaring their ontological view with respectable truthmaker theory. Presentists either fall foul of the requirements of truthmaking, or must commit to unfortunate ontological posits in order to satisfy them, thereby spoiling the supposed advantages of their view. I believe that this objection is basically sound. Still, given the enormity of responses that have been generated to this objection, one could be forgiven for thinking that there must be *some* palatable response available to presentists. I incline toward the view that presentists, as compared to eternalists, have only inferior options available to them when it comes to the accounting of truths involving the past. Though truthmaker theory offers no conclusive refutation of presentism, it does offer a strong argument in favor of eternalism. The available replies to legitimate questions about truthmaking favor eternalism over presentism.

The real challenge now, to my mind, is to say something novel that will contribute to the ongoing debate. What I offer in the present chapter is a perspective on the presentism debate that applies my conception of truthmaking as ontological accounting. It also builds on the last chapter's insight into the difference between strong and weak supervenience theorists, and how they are committed to different "strengths" of ontology, in order to offer an illuminating parallel between certain forms of nominalism and presentism. With that perspective in hand, I pose a dilemma to presentism. Either the view fails to do justice to the task of ontological accountability, or – if it succeeds – it results in a view that is less ontologically satisfying than eternalism.

I begin with a presentation of the basic argument. I then canvass the possible responses to the objection. These divide, as in the last chapter, into "easy road" and "hard road" versions. As before, the former approach respects the call for ontological accounting, but in a less theoretically

appealing way than does eternalism. The latter perspective is more problematic, and fails at the task of ontological accounting; I hope to articulate this failure in a novel way, by drawing a useful parallel with hard road nominalism. I conclude by critiquing the supposed benefits of presentism, namely, its purported appeal to common sense and its ontological parsimony. Neither advantage holds up on inspection. On the whole, this chapter provides a thoroughgoing defense of eternalism, and shows how truthmaking is a useful tool for advancing metaphysical argument.[1]

10.1 The Objection

The standard argument against presentism is easy to follow, and familiar to pretty much anyone acquainted with the literature on truthmaking.[2] It can be presented as an inconsistent triad. One piece of the puzzle endorses presentism, one endorses truthmaking, and the other endorses a particular ontological view:

(P) Only present entities belong to being.
(T) Truth supervenes on being.
(O) Many truths about the past fail to supervene on present being.

(P) is intended to capture a thesis that is unique to presentism. There are well-known challenges regarding the formulation of presentism; the issue is whether the view can be stated in a way that renders it a substantive metaphysical thesis with which eternalists disagree.[3] I myself am dissatisfied with (P) as stating a thesis unique to presentism, but I shall set the issue aside until later. What (P) hopes to communicate is the idea that, for presentists, reality is exhausted by the present. Dinosaurs used to exist, but exist no longer. They do not "belong to being." Perhaps a democratic Chinese state will exist in the future, but it doesn't now, and so it doesn't belong to being either. What does belong to being are presently existing things like birds, reptiles, and the Communist Party of China. Eternalists, by contrast, recognize past and future entities as belonging to being, right alongside everything present. For eternalists, dinosaurs and dodos *do*

[1] Many thanks regarding this chapter go to Sam Baron, from whom I have learned much about presentism and the metaphysical issues surrounding it.

[2] Presentations of the objection can be found in Armstrong (2004: chapter 11), and virtually any paper or chapter on truthmaking and presentism. For a general overview, see Caplan and Sanson 2011, Davidson 2013, Tallant 2013, and Ney 2014: 152–162.

[3] See, e.g., Crisp 2004a and 2004b and Ludlow 2004. Baron and Miller (2013) present a nuanced discussion of the nature of eternalism.

belong to being, as do future things (whatever they turn out to be). What is crucial about the presentist/eternalist divide when it comes to truthmaking is that the former team – by its own admission – has fewer resources to work with when it comes to truthmaking. However presentism is best formulated, it requires commitment to the idea that anything beyond the present is unavailable when it comes to the ontological accounting that is the task of truthmaker theory.

(T) is the truthmaking part of the triad, and is deliberately presented as the modest supervenience thesis familiar from earlier chapters. We need only, in fact, commit to Lewis's (2001b) weak supervenience thesis in addressing the problem for presentism: what is true supervenes upon what exists, what fundamental properties those things have, and what fundamental relations those things stand in. Maximalism is not necessary to the argument.

Finally, (O) is an ontological thesis, intended to be plausible upon first inspection. It is similar in spirit to the idea that nothing in reality necessitates the truth of negative existentials and universal generalizations. To be sure, one might, for philosophical reasons, posit the existence of such things as absences and totality facts. But it's not obvious from the outset that there are such things – one's commitment to them must be justified by rigorous philosophical argument. The same is true of (O). As we scan the present, we don't find any dinosaurs. Yet <There were dinosaurs> is true. Dinosaurs aren't fictional creatures like vampires and unicorns; they belong to history, not fantasy. What, then, provides the supervenience base for the truth of <There were dinosaurs>? Dinosaur fossils might be a natural reply, but the existence of those objects is metaphysically consistent with there never having been any dinosaurs. To make this point vivid, consider Russell's skeptical hypothesis that the world might have been created five minutes ago (1921: 159). In that case, the world would be indistinguishable from the way it is today, though it would have had a very different (and much smaller) past. The "fossils" in Russell's very-young-Earth creationism story are not fossils at all, though they are empirically perfect duplicates of our fossils. As a result, there can be two indiscernible presents that disagree over what's true.

The triad, therefore, appears to be an inconsistent one. Truths need to supervene on being, but they fail to supervene merely on present being. Yet present being is all there is, and so the presentist's supervenience base is insufficient. It's natural to organize responses to the objection by which of (P), (T), and (O) gets rejected. It might be suggested that we are close to a paradox here, or at least a trilemma: each of the three theses is attractive, and so there are significant costs whichever horn is rejected. That

presentation, it seems to me, gives too much credence to presentism, as I shall argue later. For the meantime, the argument is simply that the three theses are mutually inconsistent. (T) and (O), which are independently plausible, seem to entail that presentism is false.

10.2 Responses to the Objection

In our 2014 paper, Sam Baron and I classified the various presentist responses to the truthmaker objection as belonging to either the "easy road" or the "hard road." Easy road presentists, in effect, reject (O). Their move is parallel to those who, in response to the challenge posed by negative existentials, posit the existence of absences or totalities. These philosophers take the truthmaker theorist's demand as legitimate, and own up to the ontological consequences. Like the easy road nominalists from Chapter 9, they are paragons of ontological honesty. (And not, *nota bene*, the "cheats" that Sider [2001: 35–42] makes them out to be.) Hard road presentism, by contrast, rejects (T). The failure of truth to supervene on present being does not trouble the hard roader, who thinks that truthmaking principles – including even the weak supervenience principle – are implausible and problematic. The demands for ontological accounting pressed by truthmaker theorists are ill-conceived.[4]

My thesis is that none of the options pursued by either easy road or hard road presentists is superior to eternalism. The best solution to the inconsistent triad is to reject (P). After all, most parties to the debate accept that eternalists face no difficulty embracing (T) and (O).[5] The first part to making my case is to survey the various options along the easy and hard roads, and highlight what is undesirable about them. Here I can be relatively brief, as much of the groundwork has been laid out (often by presentists themselves). The second part is then to undermine the motivation for (P) in the first place. What I find somewhat surprising about the sprawling literature on the truthmaking problem for presentism is how little is said to defend the initial plausibility of presentism. There are brief nods to its supposed intuitiveness here and there, but not much else. (Perhaps this work is thought to have been sufficiently completed elsewhere.)

[4] Baron makes space for a "middle road" presentist (2015b). This view rejects (T) as stated, but considers itself no affront to truthmaker theory by offering in its place some sort of tensed understanding of supervenience. (See also Baron 2013c.) As Baron notes, such a view is "apt to collapse into the easy or hard roads in a stiff breeze" (2015b: 925). Suffice it to say that the weather seems windier to me than it does to Baron, though he offers a sturdy shelter for the middle roader.

[5] See, however, Petersen 2016.

What results is a literature that largely reads as presentist apologetics: *given* that presentism is true, what is the best response to the truthmaking objection? I find this attitude troubling, but not because of the initial credence it places on presentism. Rather, I worry that it distorts the dialectic, in that it moves the argumentative goalposts. The truthmaker objection should not be thought of as an attempted refutation of presentism. If that were the case, then it would be sufficient for the presentist to show that there is something that presentists can say to result in a stable position: "You have failed to refute me, for I can adopt this particular strategy along the easy or hard road." But the dialectical purpose of the truthmaker objection, in my view, is to be a tool to help us sort out the debate between eternalists and presentists. If we are antecedently undecided on the question of presentism versus eternalism, which view appears superior in light of truthmaking considerations? The objection is not a whip used by the eternalist to beat the presentist. Rather, it is an argument that probes the ontological questions regarding the past and the future. The presentist's ultimate goal in the face of the objection should be to show how presentism is a *superior* view to eternalism, not merely a consistent or defensible one.

Seen in this light, the dialectic is better understood as follows: (T) and (O) seem like plausible metaphysical theses. If so, whose view sits better with them – the eternalist's or the presentist's? The two theses seem to straightforwardly contradict presentism, so some heavy maneuvering is required to get around them. The eternalist, however, has a straightforward path to upholding them. Absent some strong antecedent reasons for favoring presentism (whose existence I call into doubt in Section 10.3), there is a strong case to be made for eternalism. Given the challenges at hand, why would anyone infer the truth of presentism instead of eternalism? If I may quote Hume (borrowing from his response to another form of apologetics): "The consistence is not absolutely denied, only the inference. Conjectures . . . may, perhaps, be sufficient to prove a consistence; but can never be foundations for any inference" (1993: 107).

10.2.1 The Easy Road

The standard move of the easy road presentist is to find or posit appropriate entities in the present to provide grounds for truths about the past.[6]

[6] For the sake of comprehensiveness, I should note another logically available option to (O)-denying easy roaders: deny that there are truths about the past. Markosian (2013) denies that there are any truths about the past or future that are not necessitated by the present state of the world in

As a result, presentists have proffered a proverbial menagerie of entities suited to that purpose. There is the "Lucretian" view that imbues the world with tensed properties such as *being such that there have been dinosaurs*.[7] There is the "ersatz" view that puts times understood as abstract entities to work as truthmakers.[8] There is the "evidential" view that considers present evidence to be sufficient grounds for past truth.[9] McKinnon and Bigelow (2012) make use of "past-tensed instantiation ties." Parsons (2005) employs unactualized dispositional properties. Rhoda (2009) advocates the memories of an omniscient, supernatural being as grounds.[10] Cameron posits temporal distribution properties.[11] Keller (2004) considers a view that uses haecceities of no longer existing entities.[12] One might pursue a Meinongian-style view, pronouncing subsistence but not existence upon the past, but claiming that subsistence is being enough for grounding.[13] Kierland and Monton (2007) provide a dizzying view that posits something they call "the past" that belongs to its own *sui generis* metaphysical category and so cannot be explained in any other terms. We don't really know what it is, just what it does: ground the truths about the past.[14] Similarly, there is the view that just posits facts as needed to make true claims about the past. What makes <There were dinosaurs> true? An entity called "the fact that there were dinosaurs." What is this entity like? We don't know, except to say that it makes <There were dinosaurs> true.[15]

Those interested in getting into the weeds of the various easy road solutions will find no shortage of material in which to indulge. For committed presentists, the details of the particular views are important, since they are invested in choosing the best available view off the menu.

conjunction with the laws of nature, and in his 2004 paper denies that Socrates was a philosopher. (See also Ingthorsson 2017.) Such views are empirically inadequate, to say the least, which all metaphysics should strive to be.

[7] Bigelow (1996) is the *locus classicus*, though it is also defended in Crisp 2007, Zimmerman 2008, and McDaniel 2014. For criticism see Sider 2001: 37–41, Armstrong 2004: 146–147, Merricks 2007: 133–137, Rhoda 2009: 47–49, Kierland 2013: 182–184, and Tallant 2018: 130–132.

[8] See Bourne 2006a and 2006b and Crisp 2007 for defense, and Rhoda 2009: 51–53, Sanson and Caplan 2010: 32–35, and Kierland 2013: 191–198 for criticism.

[9] See Le Poidevin 1991, and Bourne 2006b: 6–9 for criticism.

[10] See Schaffer 2008a: 309, Caplan and Sanson 2011: 202, and Kierland 2013: 198–203 for criticism.

[11] See Cameron 2011, 2013, and 2015. The view is criticized in Tallant and Ingram 2012a and 2012b and Corkum 2014.

[12] See Rhoda 2009: 49–51 for criticism. Ingram (2018) defends a similar view.

[13] I don't know of anyone who endorses this view. It's discussed in Keller 2004 and Baron 2015b.

[14] See also Kierland's "primitive record presentism" (2013).

[15] This view is noticed and quickly dismissed by Bourne 2006b. It seems to be endorsed by Craig 2003. Tallant (2009b) gives it his blessing, but doesn't personally endorse it.

For those who are not antecedently committed, however, the slate of options is not particularly appealing. The entities that easy road presentists offer – what we can call the "surrogates," following Baron (2013a) – are not exactly independently attractive. In fact, the various surrogates that have been offered in order to make, say, <Dinosaurs existed> true are all less plausible than the simple and straightforward offering defended by eternalists: any plain old dinosaur that used to exist millions of years ago. The existence of dinosaurs, after all, is established scientific fact. Their ontological reality is not under question (except by presentists). From the perspective of the neutral observer, eternalists have the upper hand in this ontological debate.

There are better and worse ways of objecting to easy road presentism. We have already encountered one of the less effective ways (see Section 1.4.1). Sider labels those who espouse some of the presentist solutions as "cheaters" because in their view, "irreducibly hypothetical properties are postulated, whereas a proper ontology should invoke only *categorical*, or occurrent, properties and relations. Categorical properties involve what objects are actually like, whereas hypothetical properties "point beyond" their instances" (Sider 2001: 41). This move is in danger of too easily begging the question – Kierland and Monton call it "sheer metaphysical prejudice" (2007: 494) – and presentists have been all too happy to either challenge Sider's criterion for "proper" ontology, or show how it doesn't apply to their particular view.[16]

More effective, it seems to me, are other attempts to systematically shut down the easy road. Sanson and Caplan (2010) argue that all the easy road options fail to offer properly explanatory truthmaking accounts. Lucretian properties, ersatz times, and God's memories don't explain why the truths about the past are true, and so cannot be their truthmakers. Baron (2013a) argues that easy road solutions require necessary connections between the surrogates and the past, which are unavailable to them. He also argues (2013b) that truths about the past ought to supervene on past being (since that's what they're about); but past being is absent, according to presentists. Matthew Davidson (2013) offers the "shifting truthmakers" objection, according to which the truthmakers for truths concerning one and the same state of affairs drastically change with time. To give a simple example, consider Socrates just before he drank the hemlock. <Socrates is a philosopher> was true, and made true by the man and his properties.

[16] See, e.g., Crisp 2007: 93–98, Kierland and Monton 2007: 493–494, Cameron 2011, and Caplan and Sanson 2011: 201.

Moments later, <Socrates was a philosopher> is now true, and made true by, say, the world's possession of the property *being such that there used to be a philosophizing Socrates*. One might have thought that two truths so intimately related would have truthmakers that at least somewhat resemble one another. But that is not the case, given most easy road solutions.

The fact of the matter, it seems to me, is that the ontology offered by easy road solutions is posited solely for the purpose of satisfying a demand for truthmakers in the context of presentism. As I advocated early on (Section 1.4), we should be suspicious of entities that are suggested solely to answer a call for truthmakers. The suspicion is especially worrisome when there are independently plausible truthmakers available (because of the eternalist alternative). This concern particularly applies to the "brute" views that posit *sui generis* facts to serve as truthmakers, or the single giant entity (if an entity it be) offered by Kierland and Monton.

This ad hoc objection against easy road truthmakers perhaps applies the least to Rhoda's view: anyone independently committed to an omniscient supernatural being is presumably also committed to such a being having veridical memories. The theory is a nonstarter for secular metaphysics, of course, and there are plenty of other objections to it. A memory of an event, so goes a familiar line of thinking, isn't the ontological ground for the claim that the event existed: that's the event's job.[17] Supposing the veridicality of memory, my memory of my wedding necessitates that <I had a wedding> is true, but this claim isn't true because of my memory. Rather, there is a "common cause" involved – the wedding itself accounts for both the accuracy of my memory and the truth of the claim attesting to its existence. Now, this sort of argument isn't fully available to me, since I've conceded that necessitators are sufficient for truthmakers. In my view, then, <I had a wedding> *is* made true by my memory of it. But in my view, my memory of the wedding also necessitates the existence of the wedding itself, so the initial event won't be missing from my overall ontology. Thus, I can't be accused of mismanaged accounting by those in the hyperintensionality camp. What would be problematic is for me to accept mere necessitators as truthmakers and adopt presentism. According to that view, <I had a wedding> is made true by my memory of the wedding, even though the wedding itself in no way belongs to reality. That is the difference between my view and Rhoda's. Rhoda is happy with an ontology that includes veridical memories of events that don't belong to

[17] Cf. Schaffer 2008a: 309, and Caplan and Sanson 2011: 202.

reality. My account prohibits any such dubious ontological scenario, in spite of my liberal attitude about truthmaking.

I conclude that we should not travel down the easy road to presentism. From an ontological point of view, it underperforms when compared to eternalism. If we care about discovering the right ontological view, and accept that thinking about truthmakers is a useful way to uncover the answers to ontological questions, then eternalism is the clear favorite. Make no mistake, I believe that easy road presentists should be applauded for their dedication to the task of honest ontological accounting. They are an ally to my overall metaphysical project, though I question their position in this particular corner of ontology. For those who are already committed presentists, there is plenty more work to be done to sort out which easy road option is optimal. But that's not my task – my task is to consider what the best account of truthmakers is for truths about the past, and eternalists have it. I do, nevertheless, suggest to antecedent presentists that they travel down the easy road instead of the hard road. In the next section, I outline the pitfalls of the hard road, and show why it fares even worse than the easy road when it comes to grounding the truth about the past.

10.2.2 The Hard Road

The hard road rejects (T), the claim that truth supervenes on being.[18] Note, then, that rejecting maximalism with respect to truths about the past does not by itself solve the truthmaker objection. For to reject maximalism is not yet to reject (T). With the case of negative existentials, for instance, one can maintain that nothing necessitates their truth without denying that they have a proper supervenience base. An ontologist who commits to this view is obligated to concede that had, say, <There are no unicorns> been false, one's ontology would need to change. The hard road presentist accepts no such obligation. Had <There were dinosaurs> been false, nothing about ontology would need to have been different. From the hard road presentist perspective, two universes that disagreed about the truth-value of <There were dinosaurs> would not need to disagree about ontology. As a result, the hard road presentist is committed to treating many straightforward truths about the past as not only truthmaker gaps,

[18] For defenses of hard road presentism see Merricks 2007, Tallant 2009a, 2009b, 2010b, and 2018, Sanson and Caplan 2010, and Baia 2012. For criticism see Armstrong 2004: 147, Krämer 2010, Asay and Baron 2014, and Torrengo 2014. See Baron (2015a) for an argument that the hard road collapses into the easy road. It relies on the kind of case that Jago (2012b) uses to defend maximalism (see Section 4.4).

but also as the ontologically indiscriminate *supervenience* gaps from Section 4.3. Hence, the view is closer to Sorensen's (2001) perspective on the truth-teller than Bigelow's (1988) on negative existentials. Presentists who prefer the hard road do not find an ally in the standard nonmaximalist.[19]

Another strategy for the hard road presentist is to reject (T) in favor of a weaker principle, something along the lines of "truth supervenes on present being or past being or future being."[20] On its most straightforward reading, however, this principle is of no use to presentism. For presentists, the categories of past and future being are empty, and so "expanding" the supervenience base in this way adds literally nothing.[21] The only way for presentists to rely on past and future being in their ontological accounting is to concede eternalism. After all, the spirit of presentism is that when it comes to ontological accounting, we should focus our attention solely on the now.

At this point the hard roader might claim to have been misunderstood: what hard roaders commit themselves to when it comes to the truth of, say, <Dinosaurs existed> is not that ontology includes some dinosaur now, but rather that ontology *used* to include some dinosaur. Had the world never included a dinosaur, then of course <Dinosaurs existed> wouldn't be true. But this doesn't mean that we should alter our ontology now to include them; we should only commit to dinosaurs previously belonging to ontology. To this response the correct reply is that the presentist has pushed the problem back a step. The ontological demand is to provide proper accounting for the truth of <Dinosaurs existed>. The present presentist reply is that one should, in response, commit to the claim that dinosaurs used to exist. In other words, when asked to account for the truth that dinosaurs existed, the presentist replies that dinosaurs existed. This is just a restatement of the truth in question, not a reply to the ontological accountant. Such a move is evident in Baia's defense of hard road presentism: "*that there were dinosaurs* depends on past dinosaurs in the following sense: No worlds differ in whether *that there were*

[19] Asay and Baron (2014) further dispute any analogy that might be drawn between truths about what doesn't exist and truths about the past. Tallant (2009b) and Baia (2012) attempt to make use of such an analogy. Their arguments, it seems to me, give too much credence to a "slippery slope" way of thinking: if it's respectable to treat one class of truths as being composed by truthmaker gaps, it's respectable to treat any other class of truths likewise.

[20] See, e.g., Tallant 2009a and Baia 2012. The view comes in for extensive criticism in Baron 2013c and 2015b. See also Westphal, who advocates a "tensed" form of maximalism: "A proposition can be true only if there is or was something in virtue of which it is true, or if there will be something in virtue of which it is true" (2006: 4). See Armstrong 2004: 147 and Heathwood 2007 for criticism.

[21] Cf. Asay and Baron 2014: 328–330. See also Baron 2013c: 389–392.

dinosaurs is true without also differing in whether dinosaurs existed" (2012: 349; cf. Tallant's [2018] explanationist strategy). Indeed. But the tautology stated here is not an ontological accounting. Of course, no worlds can differ with respect to the truth-value of <*p*> without also disagreeing about whether *p*. Agreeing to trivialities of this sort is no response to questions of ontology. It amounts to saying that accepting the instances of the truth schema ("<*p*> is true if and only if *p*") is sufficient for giving a theory of truthmaking.

What I find illuminating about Baia's defense of hard road presentism is how it reveals that the hard roader is really on the road to deflationary truthmaking, the challenge to substantive truthmaker theory discussed in Section 5.3.[22] The deflationist about truthmaking seeks to "ground" truth by observing that <*p*> is true, when it is true, because *p*. Baia's attitude seems to be that as long as he commits to the claim that dinosaurs used to exist, then he has done his proper ontological accounting for <Dinosaurs existed>. Tallant, also sympathetic to the hard road, even identifies the B-schema ("<*p*> is true because *p*") with truthmaker theory itself (2009b: 408). Similarly, after Sanson and Caplan criticize easy road presentist views on the grounds that they offer inadequate explanations, they offer an alternative form of explanation, as exemplified here: "The proposition that Arnold was pale is true because Arnold once had the property *being pale*" (2010: 26). But "Arnold once had the property *being pale*" is just "Arnold was pale" in "Pentagonese."[23] Their point is that the "proper explanation" of truths about the past is to look to *past* being rather than present being. But the very problem at hand is that the presentist is not entitled to appeal to past being, since past being is nothing in the mind of presentists. Sanson and Caplan's proffered explanation, in the context of presentism, amounts to nothing more than an instance of the B-schema and a restatement of the truth in question. No one need deny that presentists can help themselves to truths about the past when offering various explanations – the basic presupposition of the truthmaker objection is that we all make use of truths about the past. The question at hand is what legitimates that use,

[22] The hard-road-presentist-turned-deflationist appears to be what Torrengo (2014) has in mind by the "ostrich presentist." The ostrich accounts for the truth of <Dinosaurs existed> by citing <It was the case that dinosaurs exist> and maintaining that offering the latter is a "plain explanation" that is sufficient for meeting the truthmaker theorist's demands. I would prefer to call it a "brute explanation": truths are cited that are said to have no implications for ontology. After all, the "explanation" offered is just a restatement: "Dinosaurs existed" and "It was the case that dinosaurs exist" are synonymous (assuming the grammaticality of the latter, which is questionable).

[23] I'm referencing Blackburn here, who says that "corresponds with the facts" is just "is true" dressed up as a "Pentagon-type paraphrase" (1984: 227).

from an ontological point of view. Using past truths to explain past truths is all to the good, but ignores the original truthmaking question of what the ontological grounds are for those truths.[24]

If hard road presentists are relying on deflationary ideas about truthmaking, then I see no reason why they shouldn't immediately accept full-bore deflationism about truthmaking.[25] If an adequate reply to the question "What grounds the truth of <*p*>?" is "That *p*," then this should hold true regardless of which proposition is under discussion, or what tense it involves. To ground the truth of <There were dinosaurs>, one need make no ontological commitment, but simply be willing to assert that there were dinosaurs. Similarly, to ground the truth of <There are horses>, one need make no ontological commitment, but simply be willing to assert that there are horses. In effect the deflationist attitude is to say that truths don't require ontology: the talk of "grounding" motivates, at best, further commitments to more truths. It never commits one to anything in one's ontology.

When the hard road presentist appeals to the tools of the truthmaking deflationist (such as the B-schema or dubious claims about explanation), the view succumbs to truthmaking deflationism full stop. This is an ironic consequence for presentists, for they are now forced to concede that we need no ontology – past, present, or future – to ground truth. The presentist's guiding thought that the present is ontologically special is no more. The hard road presentist, who claims to be the defender of ontological common sense, ends up rejecting the very project of ontological accountability. Hard road presentism leaves both the eternalist and presentist perspectives behind in its deflationary wake. In this way, hard road presentism is a self-undermining view. Though it aims to defend the ontological uniqueness of the present, it undermines its significance. Present ontology is no more or less necessary than past or future ontology.

From the perspective of ontological accountability, hard road presentism is a drastic failure. It leads to the view that truths about the past require no accounting, which is tantamount to taking them as brute, and consistent with taking on no ontological commitments whatsoever when considering the grounds for any truth, past, present, or future. As a result, while hard road presentism *might* lead to a more economical view

[24] The hard roader might reply: "I've given you an *explanation* for these truths about the past. What more do you want?" I want an ontology, and a recognition that calls for truthmakers and/or ontological grounds are not the same thing as bald calls for explanations (as I argued in Chapter 2).

[25] Cf. Torrengo 2014: 264–268.

ontologically speaking (but see the next section), it is tantamount to accepting the entire bulk of claims about the past as being brute facts.

Still, at the end of the day, this consequence may not trouble the hard roader. This fact is due to a deep dialectical difference that at least some hard roaders accept. Here is how Tallant understands his view:

> I suggested that the wrong way to think about truth-maker here would be as a universal claim about the nature of truth. Instead, the claim that all truths have truth-makers is a hypothesis to be tested. When we test it, we find that it fails in some cases and works in others. Thus, we ought to keep the hypothesis as a restricted claim about positive existentials. Likewise, if we look to the world, claims the presentist, we will find no existent entities to act as truth-makers for talk about what was. Thus, because there are no existent entities that "truth-make" past-tensed propositions so there can be no demand for truth-makers for past-tensed propositions. Thus, talk about the past and future should not be called upon to provide truth-makers. (2009b: 414–415)

There is much in Tallant's methodology with which I sympathize. Maximalism, for instance, should not be assumed from the outset. There is independent reason for treating some truths as truthmaker gaps, and thus there is independent reason for rejecting maximalism. Tallant extends that line of thought to the case of truths about the past: there is independent reason (coming from presentism) for treating some truths as ontologically indiscriminate supervenience gaps, and so independent reason for rejecting (T), the weaker thesis that truth supervenes on being. But what he builds into this line of reasoning is the presentist conclusion. When we look to the world, he says on behalf of the presentist, we see no truthmakers for truths about the past. Tallant's perspective is that we can obtain a handle on the presentism/eternalism debate before we engage in truthmaking inquiry. That is to say, we can navigate the ontological debate without going into truthmakers. Once that exploration is finished, we can see what the consequences for truthmaker theory are. We figure out what the correct truthmaker theory is *after* we've done all of our ontological investigation.

This point of view is antithetical to the broad outlook I've offered so far. It rejects the notion that truthmaker theory is a tool for ontological investigation; Tallant's truthmaking is stripped of any probative argumentative force. It's an afterthought to ontological investigation: after we finish filling our ontological inventories, we can tally up the implications for which truths have truthmakers. My alternative approach is to use the notion of ontological accounting to arrive at tenable ontological views.

When it comes to some truths – negative existentials and analytic truths, for example – there are avenues for accounting for their truth without employing an ontology of truthmakers for them. When it comes to truths about the past, there is no parallel case to be made that they are truths that require no accounting. That is to say, while the case can be made that negative existentials are truthmaker gaps *just by looking at them and what they mean*, there is no similar defense to be made of truths about the past being supervenience gaps just by looking at them and what they mean. Why think that the truth of <There were dinosaurs> has no implications for our overall ontological outlook? The discovery of this truth was an exciting and revolutionary ontological discovery. Even negative existentials, as we have seen, have implications for our overall ontological outlook.

My argument has been that considerations of ontological accounting favor the eternalist over the presentist. When we approach the matter neutrally (and not antecedently favoring presentism, as Tallant and others do), there is no strong ontological argument that favors presentism. To the contrary, presentism fares quite poorly as an ontological view. The hard road presentist holds a frivolous attitude toward truths about the past, and offers nothing to underwrite it. (Sorensen can at least cite the unknowability of the truth-teller as grounds for treating it as a supervenience gap.) More devastatingly, hard road presentism is self-undermining. By taking onboard the tactics of the deflationary truthmaker theorist, hard road presentists abandon the ontologically serious attitude about the present that is the calling card of presentism.

10.3 Demotivating Presentism

The question before us, when it comes to the ontology of the past, is how best to account for the many truths about the past, and how that should shape our ontological commitments. Presentists have two avenues available to them. The easy road requires a surrogate ontology of unfamiliar and in some cases suspiciously ad hoc inventions. The hard road requires an enormously strong rejection of the very call for ontological accountability: truths about what used to exist turn out to be of less consequence for ontology than even truths about what doesn't exist. Furthermore, the hard road appears to be a road to abandoning truthmaking full stop. Eternalists, meanwhile, have a straightforward and scientifically respectable account to offer. From an ontological point of view, then, eternalism is the undisputed leader. If there is to be an argument for presentism, it doesn't come

from thinking about ontology. In this section, I consider and reject two possible sources of inspiration for presentism.

10.3.1 Common Sense

So how should one defend presentism – a view about ontology – without drawing on the resources of ontological investigation (i.e., truthmaker theory)? The standard answer is that presentism is "intuitive," or a piece of common sense.[26] Hilary Putnam conjectures that the main principle underlying the "man on the street's" view of time is that "All (and only) things that exist *now* are real" (1967b: 240). Dean Zimmerman claims that it is obvious and commonsensical to believe that present things are "somehow more 'real' than those wholly in the past or future" (2008: 211). Trenton Merricks asserts that presentism is the commonsense view, whereas eternalism is literally unbelievable and deserving of the incredulous stare (2007: 140). Mark Hinchliff sees presentism as a kind of "folk theory" about time, claiming that "Presentism seems to be our intuitive or commonsense conception of the nature of time" (1996: 131).

We can set aside the contentious issue as to whether or not something being "intuitive" (whatever that comes to) is of any evidential value.[27] What I want to focus on is just how difficult it would be to establish the commonsensicality of presentism, and to offer some reasons to be skeptical about it. So far as I know, the defenders of the commonsensicality claim have not given any empirical evidence for their very empirical assertion. In our age of experimental philosophy, such assertions should not be made lightly. Of course, I haven't collected any evidence either. But I do want to highlight what I take to be some barriers to collecting the relevant evidence; I doubt that such barriers can be overcome in practice.

The fundamental difficulty in assessing the attitude of the "person on the street" is the difficulty inherent to correctly articulating the distinction between presentism and eternalism. This task is difficult enough for philosophers, let alone nonexperts. The challenge is to find a way of stating what presentism is that doesn't render it obviously true, obviously false, or something that an eternalist could happily accept. Take, for instance, the thesis of interest to Putnam: all and only things that exist now are real.

[26] See, e.g., Nef 2007: 233–234 and Kierland 2013: 173.

[27] I suspect not; see Deutsch 2015. Given that a fundamental problem for presentism is its potential inconsistency with modern science (see, e.g., Putnam 1967b, Callender 2000, and Hinchliff 2000), its intuitiveness, if intuitive it be, really ought to count for little.

This claim has a reading that is straightforwardly tautological. (So it's no surprise that the people on the street agree with it, if indeed they do.) The two predicates said to be coextensive are "exist now" and "are real." Those are both present-tense attributions of existence: they're synonyms. On this reading, Putnam's thesis does not mark a difference between the presentist and eternalist. Likewise, presentism cannot be the view that all and only present things exist. "Exist" is a present-tense verb, so the thesis in question is equivalent to the claim that all and only present things presently exist. No eternalist should deny that triviality. The same problem infects my own earlier statement of presentism, (P): only present entities belong to being. "Belong" is also a present-tense verb, so of course eternalists should have no objection to (P) as stated.

Similarly, eternalists should not assert what some philosophers have suggested they are committed to. As part of his case that eternalism is not able to be believed, Merricks alleges that eternalists are committed to the claim that Martian outposts exist (2007: 139). This claim about Mars is empirically false, and Merricks doesn't explain why eternalists are committed to it. "Exist" is a present-tense verb, and so <Martian outposts exist> entails that presently (in 2007, anyway) there are Martian outposts. Why eternalism would be committed to an empirically false view regarding the settlements on Mars in the early years of the twenty-first century is mysterious – what is unbelievable is Merricks's assertion to the contrary. Likewise, Sider (an eternalist himself) happily assents to the claim that there exists a set containing a computer and a dinosaur (1999: 326; see also his 2006). He is welcome to do so on his own time, but he shouldn't in the name of eternalism (and does so at the risk of making his own view false and empirically inadequate). If sets entail the existence of their members, then Sider appears to commit himself to a presently existing dinosaur when he says there is a set that includes one alongside a presently existing computer. "There is," it goes without saying, belongs to the present tense.

In light of these considerations, it might be tempting to see the dispute between presentists and eternalists as merely verbal.[28] Or one might conclude that presentism is either trivially true ("Only present things presently exist") or trivially false ("Only present things existed, exist, or will exist").[29] To evade these conclusions, one might say that I'm

[28] For discussion, see Sider 1999: 326–327 and 2006, Callender 2000: S588–S589, Stoneham 2009, and Torrengo 2013.

[29] See, e.g., Lombard 1999: 254, Meyer 2005 and 2013, and Deasy 2019. Crisp 2004a, 2004b challenges the triviality objection; Ludlow 2004 challenges Crisp.

misinterpreting the relevant quantifiers. We should be speaking, in these matters, with quantifiers "wide open"; we should be using "our most inclusive quantifiers" (Crisp 2004a: 16).[30] Once we clarify our quantifiers, the difference between presentism and eternalism is clear. Eternalists think that there are (wide open) dinosaurs; presentists think that it's not the case that there are (wide open) dinosaurs. In effect, eternalists use "exist," despite its grammatical tense, to quantify over past and future entities in addition to present ones. Presentists can "expand" their quantifiers to range over past and future entities too, but in so doing they will add nothing to their domain of quantification, since they don't admit any past or future entities.

I must admit, however, that this response doesn't erase the worry in my mind. When I head to the refrigerator to seek out a refreshing digestif and discover that I am fresh out of drinking vinegar, I might utter "There is no shrub." My quantifier here is obviously restricted – I don't intend to say something that entails that there is no shrub to be found anywhere in the universe. Rather, the domain of quantification relevant to my utterance is limited to the contents of my refrigerator. But what it is to open wide my "there is" in this context is to expand from the refrigerator to the entire universe. I do not understand how the process of expanding the domain of quantification in this way somehow removes the tense from my utterance. "There is no shrub (in the refrigerator)" and "There is no shrub (in the universe)" are still both present-tense claims. The point is seen even more clearly in past-tense cases. My past-tense utterances ("There wasn't any shrub before I went to the store") don't cease being past tense when I widen my domain of quantification. In this case, the claim just goes from true ("There wasn't any shrub in my refrigerator before I went to the store") to false ("There wasn't any shrub in the universe before I went to the store"). If "was" doesn't cease being past tense when quantification is unrestricted, then neither does "is" cease being present tense.

Some theorists find a way to sidestep these issues. Baia (2012) defines presentism as the view that only present entities **exist**, where the bolded verb indicates a tenseless notion of existence.[31] Eternalists – though they agree with presentists that only present entities exist – believe that past and future entities **exist** alongside present ones. Presentists, meanwhile, believe that there is nothing that **exists** that doesn't also exist. What Baia's

[30] See also Hinchliff 2000: S576.

[31] See also Hinchliff's "plain exist" (1996: 123), Armstrong on "exist" in "the ontological sense" (2004: 148), and Stoneham on "exist*" (2009: 207).

formulation highlights is that presentism is not straightforwardly expressible in ordinary English; technical terminology must be introduced just to articulate the view. Those who are skeptical about the coherence of tenseless existence might conclude that there is no substantive debate to be found between presentists and eternalists. They are free to do so, but that is not my ambition. I've been taking myself to be defending eternalism, and identifying theses that the two camps disagree about. It would not be difficult to find numerous cases where I have used "exist" to mean, in effect, **exist**. My present point is only that it is highly implausible that presentism is a commonsensical theory, given that it requires a concept that doesn't find natural expression in ordinary language. Presentists who claim common sense as support for their view thus face a dilemma. If formulated in straightforward English (*à la* Putnam), their view is plausibly commonsensical (because analytically true) but not presentism; if formulated in more sophisticated language, the view is an honest expression of presentism, but no longer a serious contender for belonging to common sense. Presentism – true presentism – is a philosophically subtle ontological view that falls outside the bounds of ordinary thought.

So far I have been relying on the claim that "exists" always expresses something about the present tense (and that "existed" expresses past tense, and "will exist" future tense). I recognize that natural languages like English are complicated things, and that there might be evidence that we sometimes use "exist" in ordinary speech in order to express tenseless existence.[32] I actually hope that's true, for that would provide an answer to skeptics who doubt that there is a substantive disagreement between presentists and eternalists. But if we do use "exist" to sometimes express the present tense, and sometimes something tenseless, then that just further muddies the waters that obscure ordinary people's views vis-à-vis presentism and eternalism. Any experiment that attempts to collect people's commonsense views about presentism must somehow solve all these difficulties so that the data can be unambiguously read in favor of the commonsensical nature of presentism. I see no reason to be optimistic about the fortunes of such an enterprise. I concede that the difficulty in detecting presentism in common sense does not by itself show that it doesn't belong to common sense; but it absolutely reveals that there are significant, perhaps insurmountable barriers to anyone who wants to collect evidence that it does so belong. As a result, I conclude that

[32] See, e.g., Zimmerman 2005. Thanks go to Sam Baron and Ray Briggs for pressing me on this point.

presentists are not justified in their appeal to common sense in their defense of presentism.

10.3.2 Parsimony

Common sense offers no solace to the presentist. Perhaps a different tack could be taken. One seemingly obvious advantage to presentism is ontological parsimony (as stressed by Tallant 2009a). This advantage is not clearly available to easy road presentists, as they add unfamiliar entities to their ontology. But it has some force when it comes to hard road presentism. Eternalists are presumably committed to everything that hard road presentists are committed to, plus more. Parsimony considerations take effect, however, only when comparing theories that are equally potent. And hard road presentism is an incredibly anemic theory, ontologically speaking. So far, I've advocated ontology as a kind of theorizing that starts with the basic question of what exists. Presentists would seem to be perfectly equipped to answer that question, given their focus on present existence. But what they have to offer is woefully inadequate to satisfy the demand that I am envisioning. Ontologists are concerned, for example, with whether numbers, universals, minds, composites, possibilia, or gods need to fit into our overall theory about the world. What entities do we need to tell the story of reality? Our ontological commitments are to those things that we need to tell that story. Parsimony considerations kick in when it comes to who can tell that tale most efficiently. What I argue now is that hard road presentists don't even come close to telling that story with the ontological theory they offer.

Suppose I press a presentist for a comprehensive ontological theory, and it is delivered. Now I press the same demand upon the eternalist, and receive a second theory. Yes, the second theory will be much larger, in terms of its ontology. But the eternalist has, in effect, given me a theory that tells a story about the world at every instance of its existence. The presentist has told me a story about the world at one single moment – the moment when the demand for an ontological theory was made. What has been left out is the rest of the story relevant to all the other moments in history. To borrow the metaphor used in the last chapter, the hard road presentist's ontology can be used to write only a small fraction of the "book of the world." The eternalist's ontology can produce the whole book. Given the very different "strengths" of these competing ontologies, comparing them in terms of parsimony is pointless. Yes, the hard road presentist's ontology is leaner, but it's a theoretical lightweight.

If we want to make a genuine parsimony calculation, we have to compare the eternalist's ontological accounting against something else of equal theoretical strength. So I now ask the hard roaders to go back to work and give me their ontological theories for all the other moments. These theories, by their own admission, are full of entities they take not to exist, but presumably they can still produce them. When the presentist comes back with all of those theories, I sum together all the various theories' ontologies, and *that* sum is what I now compare to the eternalist's. This procedure is the correct way to evaluate the ontological parsimony offered by hard road presentist and eternalist theories.

The problem with this procedure is that it has hard road presentists acting in bad faith. My request is for an ontological accounting; but to give me the sort of accounting that can compete with eternalists', they must deploy an accounting that involves things they take not to exist. But in my view, you use your ontology to do your ontological accounting; you can't pay the bills with money you don't have. Yet that is what hard road presentists must do if they are to make good on their claim to a more parsimonious theory. To play the parsimony card, they must do an "extended" accounting that goes beyond what they take to exist; and in so doing, they violate the rules of the game. To do your ontological accounting with entities that don't exist is to fail to do your accounting. So hard road presentists cannot claim to have a superior view to eternalism on grounds of parsimony.

As a result, I think there is an important connection between the hard road presentist's attitude about ontology and the hard road nominalist's, as discussed in Section 9.4. For the hard road presentist, giving an ontology accomplishes very little. It doesn't succeed in giving us a comprehensive picture of the ontological character of our universe. Similarly, the hard road nominalist leaves out much about the world by dramatically separating the question of what exists from the question of how those things exist. The hard roader has a simpler story about what exists than does the easy roader and realist, but the hard roader has to go on to tell another story before the metaphysical work is done. The hard road presentist is in an even worse predicament. The hard road nominalist must submit two different accounting books: what exists, and how those things exist. These books are not in tension with each other; they just represent multiple fundamental commitments. The hard road presentist must submit indefinitely many accounting books: one for each moment of time that ever has been or will be. And yet those other books are not really in keeping with the spirit of presentism, for those books are full of nothing to which the

presentist will commit. The hard road nominalist has to take on a second fundamental commitment; the hard road presentist has to take on indefinitely more fundamental commitments, and the very act of doing so is already antithetical to the position. Hard road presentism offers a simpler story of what exists than does eternalism, but this turns out not to be an advantage. Hard roaders might have a leaner "ontology," but the ambitions of their project are drastically lower than the eternalist's. Ontology does far less overall metaphysical work for hard road presentists than it does for eternalists. In sum: hard road presentists are wrong about what the science of ontology is all about.

One way to understand my complaint about presentism is that it really does resemble an objectionable kind of "nowism" that is analogous to "hereism."[33] The latter is the nonstarting metaphysical view that reality is exhausted by what is here and here alone, not what is everywhere. Anyone tasked with doing ontology who reported back with a comprehensive ontological theory that only accounted for Earth, or for the solar system, has failed to accomplish the task at hand. It's very useful to know what there is in the solar system, but figuring out what exists in the solar system does not complete the philosophical project of discovering what there is. Similarly, it's very useful to know what exists *now*, but ontology isn't just about what exists now: it's about what used to exist and will exist as well. If dinosaurs, Roman emperors, and Neanderthals don't figure into comprehensive ontological theories, they are empirically inadequate. Even a comprehensive ontological theory that includes a *being such that there were dinosaurs* property or a divine memory of a dinosaur but no dinosaur is unacceptable.

Presentism is sometimes defined as the thesis that there is something metaphysically special about the present, that the present is "more real" than the past or future (e.g., Zimmerman 2008: 211). Maybe it is. What I think the foregoing shows is that even if this is true, the way to articulate the distinction is not ontologically. When reality is said to be exhausted by the present, we lose the distinction between what was and what never was. The actual history of the world is accorded the same ontological status as fictional histories of the world.[34] That's the wrong way to think about the matter. Maybe present entities are more real than

[33] See Conee and Sider 2005: 51–52.

[34] Tallant (2018: 216) explicitly asserts this very consequence. That he sees it as completely unproblematic, and I as completely devastating, reveals how deep and perhaps irreconcilable the debate between presentists and eternalists can be.

past ones. I don't recommend this view – fiction is the true contrast to the real, not history. Still, we shouldn't infer from the present being special that we should ontologically commit ourselves only to the present. When we do, we shirk the philosophical duty of offering a comprehensive ontological understanding of our world. A comprehensive physical theory of the universe doesn't care, so to speak, if you live on Earth or Kepler-186f. Nor should a comprehensive ontological theory care if you're a contemporary of Kant or Kripke.

10.4 Conclusion

Ontological accounting is best served by taking on ontological commitments to the past. Eternalists have a straightforward method for doing so, since they see past and present entities as equally important to the goal of understanding the overall ontological nature of our universe. Arguments for presentism must derive from other sources, but they can't, I've argued, rely on common sense or parsimony. If there are good arguments for presentism (and I by no means claim to have exhausted all the myriad angles on the debate), they are not straightforwardly ontological in nature. For example, our experience of the passage of time might be thought to motivate an "A-theory" of time that treats temporal passage as an objective feature of reality;[35] and then it might be argued that presentism is the most hospitable ontological home for the A-theorist. Since this book is a study in ontology (and I've remained neutral regarding A- and B-theories), I rest content with my conclusion that presentism doesn't fare well as a worthwhile ontological view. That's a significant cost, but perhaps one that could be offset by other considerations.

Before moving on, I should issue an apology to philosophers compelled by the growing block theory of time.[36] This view is that while the past and present are both real, the future is not. Most of what I have said in this chapter could equally well be advocated by the growing block theorist, as my arguments insist on the ontological seriousness which we must accord to the past. What divides the growing block and eternalist views are claims about the future. I haven't focused on those cases because I am less confident in what to say. To lose sight of the ontological difference between dinosaurs and vampires is to commit a great ontological mistake.

[35] See, e.g., Baron 2017 for discussion.

[36] See, e.g., Tooley 1997 and Forbes 2016. Miller (2018) discusses the growing block theory in the context of truthmaking.

Does the growing block theorist similarly err in denying the reality of tomorrow night's lasagna dinner? Perhaps not. Just how many truths there currently are about the future is more contentious than the obviously settled issue of the truths about the past. Truthmaker theory is most productive when we begin from a set of truths that can be agreed to by the partisans of various metaphysical views. It's not obvious that we have that here. Truthmaker arguments cease to be effective when we don't agree on what the initial truths are. And considerations about truthmaking alone, it seems to me, won't motivate the growing block theorist to start believing in truths about the future. *If* it's true that there will be theme parks on the moon, then we need ontological grounds for this truth. At that point, I would argue that eternalists take the upper hand, and maintain that it's Lunar Land™, a future entity, that provides the most straightforward ontological answer. Growing block theorists would have to travel down their own easy or hard roads, and thereby face objections parallel to those I have raised against presentists.

CHAPTER 11

Mathematics

The metaphysics of mathematics is among the oldest topics in philosophy – as evidenced by the name of one of the leading views: Platonism. Accordingly, my goal for the present chapter is modest. What I want to showcase is how thinking about truthmakers can bring some clarity to the ongoing debate concerning the ontological status of mathematical entities, and advance one position on the topic. In line with my way of thinking about truthmakers, there is no single position on the ontology of numbers that results from truthmaker theory. Rather, various theses and arguments that play a role in the ongoing dialectic can helpfully be viewed from within the framework of truthmaker theory. Still, the view I advance might be thought to be guilty of shirking its responsibility toward truthmaking (or, put differently, might be thought to be unappealing to traditional truthmaker theorists). I intend to show otherwise.

I begin with what is nowadays the most familiar argument in the ontology of mathematics: the indispensability argument. Close inspection of it reveals that the notion of truthmaking is indeed playing a role, and that by thinking about indispensability and truthmaking in tandem, both ideas emerge with greater clarity. Focusing on indispensability will shed light on what the ontological stakes are in the overall debate, so in the second section I present what I take to be the most tenable ontological positions. I then offer my own contribution to the truthmaking question about mathematics (which some might find a bit too "deflationary" for their tastes), and conclude by comparing and contrasting my view with a recent brand of mathematical "trivialism."

11.1 Indispensability

The main idea behind indispensability arguments is easy to grasp.[1] The general line of thought, typically traced back to Quine (e.g., 1948), is that mathematics is indispensable to contemporary scientific theorizing, and thus commitments to contemporary scientific theories accompany indispensable commitments to mathematics. Hence, if mathematical theorizing is committed to a "realist" or "Platonist" ontology of numbers (i.e., a realm of abstract objects), so too is contemporary scientific theorizing. Platonism isn't head-in-the-clouds *a priori* philosophizing: it's good science. Putnam succinctly articulates the argument: "quantification over mathematical entities is indispensable for science, both formal and physical; therefore we should accept such quantification; but this commits us to accepting the existence of the mathematical entities in question" (1971: 57).

Crucial to the indispensability line of reasoning is the notion of ontological commitment, which Quine famously brought to the fore. For Quine, to ontologically commit yourself to something is to say that there is such a thing. (At least, once one is speaking from within a fully regimented formal language.) For instance, Quine writes, "classical mathematics, as the example of primes between 1000 and 1010 clearly illustrates, is up to its neck in commitments to an ontology of abstract entities" (1948: 32). This result is a bit quick, even by Quinean standards. Presumably he's interested in the mathematical claim <There is a prime number between 1000 and 1010, namely, 1009>. A believer in this claim, Quine would maintain, is committed to there being prime numbers, there being prime numbers between 1000 and 1010, and anything else of an existentially quantified nature that follows from the claim. It doesn't strictly follow, however, that there are abstract entities, unless one adds in the premise that any prime number between 1000 and 1010 is an abstract entity. Nevertheless, commitment to the truth of <There is a prime number between 1000 and 1010> accompanies an ontological commitment to prime numbers.

The basic indispensability argument has the following structure:

(1) Commitment to mathematics is indispensable to commitment to contemporary science.

[1] See Colyvan (2001) for a thorough investigation into indispensability arguments, and Baker (2009) for a more recent innovation to the argument.

(2) Commitment to mathematics involves an ontological commitment to mathematical entities.

Therefore,

(3) Commitment to contemporary science requires ontological commitment to mathematical entities.

The conclusion is typically thought to carry antinominalistic implications. Mathematical nominalism is not necessarily the same view as the nominalism discussed in Chapter 9. There, nominalism is the view that there are no universals: the world is a world of particulars. In the mathematical context, "nominalism" is typically taken to mean the rejection of "abstract" entities in the sense of objects that exist but fail to be spatiotemporal. Numbers are usually paradigmatic examples of abstract entities in this sense.[2] If so, nominalists need to reject either (1) or (2). Disposing of (1) is the project that Hartry Field undertakes in *Science without Numbers* (1980). More common is finding ways to challenge (2). In particular, one might challenge the Quinean conception of ontological commitment that underlies it.[3]

What contribution does truthmaker theory bring to the dialectic? First, I think it brings a reminder that the core ontological issue at hand is ultimately independent of the sort of naturalistic methodology that underwrites (1). That naturalistic methodology, in effect, declares that ontological questions are ultimately to be decided by total scientific investigation; the truth of mathematics has a role to play *only if* it turns out to be indispensable to the scientific endeavor. The naturalist who adopts Field's project says, in effect, that if we can have a leaner but adequate worldview by jettisoning mathematics, so much the better. What this perspective denies is any theoretical autonomy to mathematics. The only reason we have to believe that two and two are four is that the scientists tell us so. That the mathematicians tell us so is irrelevant, insofar as those mathematicians operate independently of empirical science.

Anyone who thinks mathematics does have theoretical autonomy[4] – that it can give us reason to believe in truths independently of its relationship to the empirical sciences – still faces the truthmaking question, even if (1) turns out to be false. Suppose Field is correct, and empirical science can

[2] But see Bigelow 1988 and Maddy 1990.

[3] See, e.g., Melia 2000, Azzouni 2004, and Leng 2010. Colyvan (2010) provides a critical survey of this general strategy.

[4] See, e.g., Maddy 1992 and Colyvan 2007.

be "nominalized" in a way that dispenses with any need of mathematical truths. It doesn't follow – unless one adopts a deeply scientistic methodology – that there aren't mathematical truths. Even if <There is an even prime number> figures into no true scientific theory, it doesn't follow that there is no even prime number. As a result, Field's project, if successful, could block the indispensability argument by disproving (1). But it doesn't by itself show that there are no mathematical truths to be reckoned with. And if there are mathematical truths to be reckoned with, then there are questions as to what, if anything, makes them true. Rejecting (1) is no automatic escape from the question of what makes mathematical judgments true, and so no automatic escape from Platonism or other mathematical ontology.

A second benefit that truthmaker theory brings to the dialectic is that it illuminates what must be involved in a rejection of (2). Sam Baron (2013d) makes this point when he shows how it's not enough to defend one's rejection of (2) by arguing against Quine's criterion of ontological commitment. This is because there could be *other* criteria of ontological commitment – such as those offered by various truthmaker theorists – that also result in (2). If one adopted a truthmaker theory of ontological commitment, such that one is committed to whatever one takes to be the truthmakers for one's overall scientific theory, and one thought that numbers were truthmakers for the mathematical claims indispensable to those theories, then scientific theories still emerge committed to numbers, the rejection of Quine's criterion notwithstanding.[5]

What truthmaker theory brings to the table is a focus on the question "What makes mathematical judgments true?" This question can be asked independently of the loaded naturalistic methodology that denies any theoretical autonomy to mathematics, and independently of the merits and flaws of Quine's criterion of ontological commitment. The mathematical nominalist's true task is not to answer the indispensability argument, but to answer the truthmaker theorist's question in a way that doesn't abandon nominalism.

11.2 Mathematical Truth and Mathematical Truthmakers

The phrase "indispensability of mathematics" carries an ambiguity. What exactly is held to be indispensable? On the one hand, the idea might be that a Platonistic *ontology* of abstract numbers is indispensable. If those

[5] For an example of theorists taking just this strategy, see Newstead and Franklin 2012.

things don't exist, contemporary scientific theories can't be true. On the other hand, it might be that the *truth* of mathematical judgments is what's at stake: for contemporary scientific theories to be true, the mathematical judgments that partially compose them must be true.

The indispensability of mathematics, therefore, might be a claim about truth, or a claim about truthmakers (or both). Friends of truthmaking know that these two matters must be kept separate – even though they have implications for one another – and that not attending to the distinction can result in confusion and bad arguments. Recognizing the separation also enables certain kinds of responses to the indispensability argument. Azzouni (2004), for instance, upholds that the truth of mathematics is indispensable to science, but at the same time denies that the truth of these claims forces a Platonistic ontology. Quine (1948), by contrast, seems to assume that if there are truths to the effect that there are numbers, then there must be a Platonistic ontology that is responsible for their truth. In both cases, we can discern how views about the relationship between mathematical truth and mathematical ontology (i.e., the relationship of truthmaking that obtains between them) influences positions in the philosophy of mathematics.

I have no interest in questioning the legitimacy of mathematics. That is to say, I do not deny that mathematics is a source of mathematical *truths*.[6] I strive to defend a philosophy that is both empirically and mathematically adequate. Even if Field could prove to me that physics doesn't require me to believe that there is an even prime, I would still happily accept proof from the mathematicians that there is. Hence, I will not be questioning the body of truths delivered by mathematicians; I accept that mathematics is a legitimate albeit nonempirical science. I do not take it to be part of mathematics, however, to investigate the ontological grounds for mathematical truth – that falls under the purview of the metaphysics of mathematics. As a metaphysician who embraces mathematical truth, then, I face the truthmaker theorist's question: What are the ontological grounds for mathematical truth?

One of the proposals propounded again and again in this book is that in order to gain insight into a particular metaphysical view, we must attend to how that view answers questions about truthmaking. The same method applies here. We know what some of the main metaphysical positions are: the Platonist, the nominalist, the naturalist, and others. Presumably, the

[6] Hence I have no sympathy for a fictionalist approach to mathematics, as described in Balaguer 1998: chapter 5. See also Bueno 2009.

views answer the truthmaking question differently – that's what separates the views. But as always happens with labels, sometimes the borders are blurred, and distinct theses end up being conflated. My goal at present is not to offer a thoroughgoing taxonomy of the terrain (though the resources I've already introduced would enable doing so), but instead to identify some of the dangers involved in articulating one's position in the philosophy of mathematics. Once again, I see careful attention to truthmaking as being a useful means of getting clearer on our views.

Early on, I suggested that the project of providing truthmakers be thought of as a way of finding equilibrium between one's "belief box" and "ontological inventory." On the one hand, there are certain claims that we take to be true; on the other, there are certain objects that we take to belong to reality. As I understand things, what it is to believe something is conceptually distinct from what it is to ontologically commit to something, though the two activities are closely related. For a Quinean, the relationship between the two is straightforward: your ontological commitments are (or are expressed by) your existentially quantified beliefs.[7] For other philosophers (especially those attending to truthmaking), the matter is more complicated, which reveals why certain definitions of Platonism cannot tell the whole story. Field, for instance, defines the mathematical Platonist as someone who "(a) believes in the existence of mathematical entities (numbers, functions, sets and so forth), and (b) believes them to be mind-independent and language-independent" (1989: 1). For reasons I shall now explain, this definition makes Platonism too easy, and shrinks the possibilities for nominalist understandings of mathematics.

Consider first Azzouni's preferred response to the Quinean defender of indispensability. He writes: "a need to quantify over mathematical objects in the context of a scientific theory that we take to be true is no reason, by itself, to think that such items exist" (1997: 484). This claim may look to be straightforwardly contradictory. An example of a need to quantify over mathematical objects would be an assertion of, say, <There are even prime numbers>. But <There are even prime numbers> and <There exist even prime numbers> are identical. So anyone who asserts a quantification over mathematical objects is asserting the existence of those objects. To avoid the contradiction, Azzouni needs to rely on resources he articulates in later

[7] In *Word and Object*, it's clear that this claim applies only to the existentially quantified claims that follow from a theory one accepts within a fully regimented formal language (Quine 1960). This qualification isn't obviously present in "On What There Is" (Quine 1948). Nevertheless, I've sensed (as has Azzouni 2004: 50) that many philosophers in the meantime have accepted that existentially quantified beliefs expressed in natural languages also are ontologically committing.

work (e.g., Azzouni 2004 and 2007). There, Azzouni draws a distinction between ontologically committing quantification and non-ontologically committing quantification.[8] In effect, there is a distinction to be drawn between *existence* and *real existence*. It's one thing for there to be numbers; it's another for there *really* to be numbers. Only the latter claim compromises the nominalist. Real existence – that is to say, the kind of existence that is relevant to discussions over ontological commitment – is articulated by Azzouni in terms of ontological independence. For Azzouni, mathematics requires there to be numbers, but not ontologically independent numbers. By Azzouni's lights, although mathematics (and therefore empirical science) quantifies over numbers, it doesn't assign them the kind of ontological independence that would make them relevant to ontology. Elephants and electrons are ontologically independent, and so theories that quantify over them will predicate ontological independence of them. But numbers, though they exist, are not ontologically independent, and so their existence does not contradict nominalism, now understood as the thesis that no abstract objects exist in an ontologically independent way.

It is not my intent to defend Azzouni's particular views about ontological commitment, or his conception of ontological independence. What I find most useful in his account is how he articulates a position that allows us to clearly distinguish the issues of mathematical truth and mathematical ontology. Different parties to the debate could agree to certain mathematical truths while disagreeing over their truthmakers. (Doing so is second nature to anyone well steeped in the truthmaking literature.) Look again at Field's definition of Platonism: the Platonist accepts the existence of mind-independent and language-independent mathematical entities. It would seem, then, that anyone who believed that there is an even prime number, independently of what anyone thought or said about the matter, would thereby be a Platonist (Azzouni included, presumably). But what Azzouni calls our attention to is a distinction between <There are numbers> and <There are ontologically independent numbers>. The latter entails the former, but not vice versa. And most importantly for our purposes, the former need not be made true in the same way that the latter is. The Platonist's core idea is that mathematical truth is grounded in a realm of abstract mathematical entities, where this realm's existence is not simply written into the truth of <There are numbers>. (Similarly: not everyone who believes that there are properties is thereby a believer in a realm of transcendent Platonic forms.) The Platonist is an ontological *interpreter* of

[8] Cf. Hofweber 2000 and 2005.

mathematical truth; establishing the truth – even mind- and language-independent truth – of ordinary mathematics is not sufficient for establishing Platonism. The latter is an ontological view, and arises from reflection upon the ontological grounds for mathematical truth. To concede the objectivity of mathematical truth is not yet to concede a Platonic metaphysics of mathematics.

The Platonist, I suggest, is best understood as an ontological position that embraces the existence of a particular kind of mathematical reality that grounds mathematical truth. What is the nature of that reality? That is a difficult question, and Dummett, it seems to me, catches sight of the inherent difficulty in articulating Platonism:

> Platonism, as a philosophy of mathematics, is founded on a simile: the comparison between the apprehension of mathematical truth to the perception of physical objects, and thus of mathematical reality to the physical universe. For the Platonist, mathematical statements are true or false independently of our knowledge of their truth-values: they are rendered true or false by how things are in the mathematical realm. (1978: 202)

The virtue of Dummett's observation here is that Platonism relies on a simile: there is a mathematical realm analogous to the physical realm with which we are all intimately familiar. Furthermore, that realm plays a truthmaking role ("rendered true"), just as the physical realm does. It's difficult to fully spell out what this mathematical realm is supposed to be like (and without recourse to myth, as Plato himself did in the *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and elsewhere).[9] And it's especially hard to do so without encouraging the skeptics in the debate, who would prefer to see Platonism (and its denial) rejected as ultimately nonsensical.[10] Still, I find the analogy sufficient to render intelligible the basic Platonist idea. Platonists think we need another realm of abstract mathematical reality to ground mathematical truth, in a way that is analogous to how nonmathematical reality grounds nonmathematical truth.

To consider other possible non-Platonist views regarding realism about mathematical ontology, we need to consider alternative ontological pictures. One could try to locate mathematical objects in the spatiotemporal world.[11] On such views, numbers might be identified with aggregates of physical objects, or properties of such aggregates. Or, as in Armstrong's

[9] More recently, Rayo (2013: 74) also uses a myth to illustrate Platonism. Cf. Cameron 2010c: 408.
[10] Here I have in mind the conventionalism of Carnap (1950) and "no fact of the matter" views like Balaguer's (1998).
[11] See, e.g., Mill 1930, Bigelow 1988, and Maddy 1990.

view, they might be identified with certain universals (though not universals that exist "abstractly") (1997: 175–184, 2004: 112–116).

To develop an antirealist perspective on mathematical ontology, one could turn to error theory (Field 1980) or fictionalism (see Balaguer 1998: chapter 5, and Bueno 2009). Here, realism is avoided by jettisoning mathematical truth altogether; the views are thus antirealist about both mathematical truth and mathematical ontology. Other views – which I independently find most attractive – might try to marry a thoroughgoing realism about mathematical truth with a thoroughgoing antirealism about mathematical ontology.[12] One form of this would be to develop an "antirealist" ontology to ground mathematical truth. This form of antirealism would presumably go about grounding mathematical truth in mind-dependent entities of some kind. "Psychologistic" views that identify numbers with ideas in our heads, for instance, are not so popular – Balaguer takes Frege to have refuted them over a century ago (1998: 105).[13] A kind of intuitionism interpreted metaphysically might maintain that the events of proving a mathematical statement are the truthmakers for those statements. Such a view would carry the unfortunate consequence that the truth of mathematical statements is contingent, because it depends on the actions of those who think about them.[14]

So far I've considered views that ground mathematical truth in paradigmatically realist ontology (either Platonic objects or aggregates of physical objects) or paradigmatically antirealist ontology (mental states or human actions). The option I want to explore more thoroughly in the remainder of the chapter, however, attempts to dispense with ontological grounds altogether. We haven't met this option yet with other domains of thought;

[12] Back in Chapter 8, I didn't distinguish as I am now between being a realist with respect to either the truths of a domain or the ontology grounding that domain. Quasirealism, for instance, was described as an antirealist metaethical view *simpliciter*, not as being realist toward moral truth but antirealist toward moral ontology. I could have so described it, but I didn't. The reason I'm doing so now is that it's useful – the questions and positions that take focus in the mathematical debate aren't always the ones that take focus in the metaethical one. A live option in the mathematics case – one which I am tempted to endorse – is that mathematical truth is ultimately analytic, trivial, or vacuous in an appropriate sense. If so, it won't be grounded by, say, a Platonistic ontology. But it's not obvious to me that such views carry a broad antirealist feel about mathematics (as do views that, say, deny that there is any mathematical truth at all). To take a body of truths as analytic is not to be antirealist about them; at least, analytic truths *qua* analytic truths do not carry the usual connotations suggested by "antirealism." (Colyvan [2001: 4] seems to disagree.) By comparison, there is no parallel tenable position in metaethics, according to which moral judgments are analytically true and so in need of no moral truthmakers.

[13] See, e.g., Husserl 2003 and Frege 1894.

[14] Read (2010) argues that proofs are the truthmakers for mathematical (and other necessary) truths, though his proofs appear, as far as I can tell, to be abstract objects, and so no retreat from Platonism.

the idea of taking moral judgments, claims about the past, or claims about physics and chemistry as true but lacking any ontological ground whatsoever is typically a nonstarter. But that's not the case with mathematical truth. In fact, separating mathematical truth from any ontology comes with the added bonus of better understanding what makes mathematical inquiry special, such as its status as an *a priori* discipline.

11.3 Mathematical Truth without (Substantive) Ontology

In Chapter 7 I proposed a truthmaking-based account of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. Analytic truths owe their truth in no way to what exists in the world; synthetic truths do. How specifically this proposal should be developed depends on nearby views concerning what it is to be a truthmaker, and which truths have them. Given that I endorse metaphysical necessitation as being necessary and sufficient for truthmaking, I am committed to the claim that everything whatsoever makes true necessary truths, including mathematical truths. So in my view, mathematical claims *do* have truthmakers, albeit "trivial" ones. As I argued in Section 3.3, this claim is unobjectionable, though many find it to be bordering on the absurd. To claim that mathematical truths trivially have everything for a truthmaker is tantamount to arguing that mathematical truths need no special ontological basis. It is not the claim that, say, my desk lamp is "responsible" for the truth of <7 + 5 = 12> in the way that Kripke is responsible for the truth of <Kripke exists>; that view presupposes the explanation-first understanding of truthmaking that I reject. From the perspective of truthmaking as ontological accounting, conceding that mathematical truths stand only in trivial truthmaking relations amounts to the thesis that we don't need any special mathematical ontology in order to account for their truth. This is a defensible (though of course controversial) thesis with a long heritage, and I heartily place myself within it.

What would be objectionable is to accept that mathematical truths are only ever trivially made true, while at the same time believing mathematical truth to be synthetic. That would be like accepting your cat's most recent hairball as a truthmaker for <God exists>. For on my account, to accept a truth as synthetic is to treat it as being ontologically relevant: its truth makes a difference to what does and doesn't exist. It influences your ontological commitments. Trivial truthmaking for mathematics is plausible only if mathematical truths are analytic, which in my view is to say that their truth makes no difference to ontology.

I don't pretend to be able to comprehensively defend here and now the claim that mathematical truth is analytic. (For those who might continue to be skeptical of my use of "analytic," replace this word with "vacuous," "trivial," or something similar.) What is more manageable is to defend the idea that such a view is perfectly consistent with a truthmaking-first approach to metaphysics and ontology. Taking truthmaking seriously doesn't inevitably lead to Platonism or error theory. It's not hard to appreciate why it might. Mathematical truths might appear to be about abstract objects, so either they're true and therefore made true by those abstract objects, or they're not true because those objects don't exist. My goal is to articulate why the anti-Platonist need not perform any disservice to truthmaker theory when it comes to mathematical truth. If this task can be accomplished, then I think it constitutes at least a *prima facie* defense of the position: it holds an inherent advantage over both Platonism (on parsimony grounds) and error theory (by accepting the legitimacy of mathematics as a science). Whether the position is superior all things considered is a topic too expansive for this chapter.

Here is the account. Mathematical truths make no substantive ontological demands upon the world. By this I mean that in accepting mathematical truths into one's belief box, one does not need to add anything substantive to one's ontological inventory. That is to say, one's ontology does not become less parsimonious after adding the truths of mathematics to one's cognitive repertoire. I say that mathematical truth does not force any "substantive" ontological addition because it does force ontological additions, albeit trivial ones. I believe that it's a mathematical fact that there is an even prime, namely, 2. As a result, 2 belongs in my ontological inventory. I have a hard time comprehending any way of committing to the truth of "There is an even prime" without also committing to 2 in my ontological inventory.[15] I take this perspective to be in line with my stated respect for and deference to mathematical practice. (If it turns out that genuine commitment to the truths discovered by mathematical practice involves zero ontological commitments, even trivial ones, then I will withdraw my claim here.)

But the addition of 2 to my ontological inventory is a trivial one. By this I mean a number of things. First, adding it to one's ontological inventory

[15] This is *not* because I accept Quine's criterion for ontological commitment. It seems to me that "There are things that don't exist, namely, unicorns" is not ontologically committed to unicorns – it's expressing the opposite of such a commitment – which suggests that "there is" all by itself does not semantically guarantee the presence of an ontological commitment.

does not involve a reduction in parsimony of that inventory. That is to say, it comes for "free." There is a number 2 – that's what mathematics teaches us – but its presence in our inventories doesn't enlarge them in a meaningful way. Trivial ontological commitments can't help but exist. In a sense, everyone is necessarily committed to them, no matter what one believes. Hence, they play no role in determining which theories have ontological advantages over others.

Second, to say that something is a trivial ontological addition is to say that it is a trivial truthmaker, in the following sense. To say that x is a trivial truthmaker is to say that it only makes trivial truths true. Recall from Section 3.4 that I defined trivial truthmaking as follows: for all p and x, $<p>$ is trivially made true (or a "trivial truth") if and only if for all x, x is a truthmaker for $<p>$. A trivial truthmaker makes all the trivial truths true – everything does that – but no other. In this sense, trivial truthmakers are the "weakest" things in one's ontology. The only truthmaking powers they possess are the truthmaking powers that literally everything possesses, but nothing above and beyond that. In my view, any contingent object makes all the necessary truths true, and plenty of contingent truths to boot. But the trivial truthmakers only make necessary truths true.

My proposal, then, is this. Mathematical *truths* are trivial: they are made true by each and every thing in the universe. Mathematical *objects* are also trivial: they make the trivial truths true, but nothing else. So while the number 2 exists, it is, in effect, an ontologically innocuous addition. Thus, its belonging to someone's inventory is not a strike against that inventory's parsimony. On this view, 2 not only makes <There is an even prime> true, but also <The square root of 7 exists> and Fermat's last theorem. (In this respect, it is just like every other object, mathematical or not.) But the truthmaking in question is all trivial. If these consequences sound odd – that 2 is a truthmaker for mathematical claims not involving 2 – I suggest that the oddness is yet another byproduct of the explanation-first paradigm. When it comes to necessary truths, truthmaking is abundant, promiscuous, and indiscriminate. As it should be.

The truths of mathematics are thus unlike claims such as <Horses exist>, which do force substantive additions to one's ontology, but they are also unlike <Unicorns don't exist>, which imposes an ontological constraint on unicorns being absent from one's ontology (and might – if maximalists are correct – impose an addition of a totality or absence). That is to say, mathematical truths are not truthmaker gaps. What they lack is any nontrivial truthmaker. They are also unlike cases of substantive, synthetic necessary truths – if there are any – which would require

nontrivial truthmakers. Take <God exists>. One fails at ontological accounting if one adds it to one's belief box without adding a supernatural being to one's ontology. My proposal is that one does not fail at accounting if one adds all of mathematics to one's belief box, and yet adds nothing substantive to one's ontology. The mathematical objects are there, but trivially so. I now hope to better elucidate the view by seeing how it relates to other, more familiar conceptions of mathematical ontology.

I see my position as standing in stark contrast to traditional Platonism, as I have been envisioning it. The form of Platonism I find most intelligible, distinctive, and worthy of the name is one that treats mathematical truths as requiring an additional ontological playing field, over and above the ontology needed to ground the body of contingent truths. The realm of the mathematical is an exciting and mysterious dimension of ontology, just like the theistic realm, if it exists. These Platonists think that we need such a realm to ground mathematical truth, just as we need the physical world to ground nonmathematical truth; my perspective disagrees. My view does not classify the truths of mathematics alongside contingent truths that make demands upon the world, nor with substantive necessary claims about supernatural entities. Instead, my account finds mathematical truths to be far more similar to truths of logic and truths that are "true by definition," "true in virtue of meaning," or "vacuously true." As a result, the truth or falsity of such claims has no genuine bearing on our ontological inventories.

On the one hand, then, I see my view as allied with the Fregean tradition of understanding mathematics in an analytic way. Doing so introduces the specter of logicism, and the reminder that generations of philosophers have accepted that Frege's project of reducing mathematics to logic was a failure. I am not nearly so pessimistic about Frege's fundamental ambition, and am happy to throw my lot in with contemporary neo-Fregeans who have revived and improved the project (e.g., Hale and Wright 2001).

On the other hand, I see my view as presenting no affront to at least a fairly broad understanding of "nominalism." But at this point an abundance of caution is needed. For many neo-Fregeans understand themselves to be Platonists, and Platonists and nominalists are supposed to be the two fundamentally disagreeing camps. As Rayo succinctly puts it: "Platonism is the view that there are mathematical objects; nominalism is the view that there aren't any" (2009: 239). I would describe the difference more elaborately. Platonism (or, at least, a Platonism worth the name) is the view that there is a *sui generis* mathematical reality in virtue of which

mathematical statements are true or false, parallel to the way that there is a physical reality in virtue of which physical statements are true or false. I describe Platonism this way because otherwise it ends up encompassing almost every view that is not skeptical with respect to mathematical truth. If <There are numbers> is true (as everyone but the error theorist and fictionalist agrees), then there are mathematical objects: there are numbers. If that's all Platonism is, then even theorists like Azzouni fall within its purview. (What Azzouni denies is that there are mathematical objects that *exist in an ontologically independent way*.) At the same time, my fully specified Platonism may well not be accepted by self-declared Platonists such as Hale and Wright. Perhaps so. In that case, I think the right moral to draw is that focusing the dialectic on "Platonism" and "nominalism" fails to capture what is most up for grabs in the debate; at the least, it suggests that in some corners of the terrain there is less *ontological* disagreement in the discussion than is usually thought.

The question at the heart of the ontology of mathematics, in my view, is this: Suppose we have a "finalized" theory of the truthmakers for all nonmathematical truths about the world. Do we need anything else to ground the truth of mathematics? One view answers affirmatively: we need a realm of ontology that deals specifically with the mathematical. I call that view "Platonism." Another view answers negatively: No, we don't need anything else (or even anything at all). My version of this view requires a bit more subtlety to articulate. There are mathematical objects – that's just what the true mathematical propositions say – but we don't *need* them to serve any ontological or truthmaking role. On this view, mathematical objects can't help but exist, but that's not to say that they play the sort of truthmaking duty as required from the Platonist perspective. I take this stance to be in accordance with the general outlook of those who identify as nominalists.

It might be objected that my outlook is undeserving of the name "nominalism." Though it rejects a *sui generis* Platonic realm of mathematical objects (whatever that really comes to), it nevertheless accepts that there are numbers and refuses to identify them with anything in the physical world, and so is committed to there being abstract objects: it is therefore no form of nominalism. My response at this juncture is to question whether I have any cognitive grasp left of what "abstract" amounts to. I think I have a grasp on the view that I am calling "Platonism," at least by way of analogy with the spatiotemporal world and how contingent truths are made true by it (and by way of analogy with theological cases). Once that view is rejected, what ontological disagreement remains? If committing to the truth of <There are

even prime numbers> commits me to abstract objects, then it turns out that a commitment to abstract objects need not involve any substantive addition of ontology. For in my view, <There are even prime numbers> is analytically true, and so of no ontological consequence. The number 2 exists, but only trivially so. Consequently, a "commitment to abstract mathematical objects" also turns out to be ontologically vacuous. Yes, there are numbers. But when making such a concession, one's ontology doesn't grow in a way that sacrifices its parsimony. An "addition" of a number is no addition at all in the relevant sense. I admit that this sort of claim might be puzzling, and I aim to unpack it in the remainder of this section.

It might be worthwhile to compare my view with those espoused by two philosophers I take to be fellow, or at least sympathetic, travelers. (Perhaps they are not in my lane exactly, but at least adjacent ones.) Azzouni, as I've stressed, distinguishes <There are numbers> from <There are numbers *that exist ontologically independently*>. Perhaps he would say that only the latter is committed to abstract objects. If so, *he's* not committed to abstract objects, since he believes only the former. But Azzouni, make no mistake, is committed to numbers in at least some sense. He thinks <There are numbers> is true, not <There are no numbers> (which the error theorist thinks is true). Azzouni would claim that this commitment is not an ontological one: numbers enter one's ontology only via <There are numbers that exist ontologically independently>. I would say instead that <There are numbers> does ontologically commit one to numbers (what else could it be saying?), but that this commitment comes at zero ontological cost. An ontology that refuses to commit to numbers is no more parsimonious than one that refuses to do so.

Next consider Thomas Hofweber's view (e.g., 2000, 2005). He maintains that sentences that employ "there are" are ambiguous between substitutionally and objectually quantified readings. We could interpret "There are numbers" as expressing a claim relying exclusively on substitutional quantification, such that it involves no ontological commitment to numbers. This is yet another way of articulating the thought that although one might believe that there are numbers, one isn't thereby ontologically committed to abstract objects. Again, I am happy to ontologically commit to numbers – and avoid commitment to Hofweber's views about the different quantifiers at play – but insist that we see this commitment as trivial.

There is ample precedent for the view that mathematical claims can be true, and yet make no difference to ontology in the relevant sense. How exactly that view is articulated may turn, as the cases of Azzouni and Hofweber demonstrate, on one's background views about quantification

and ontological commitment. The view I favor amounts to the claim that no nontrivial truthmakers whatsoever are required to sustain mathematical truth. One consequence that follows might sound somewhat awkward. In principle, there is no substantive ontological difference between me and the mathematical error theorist. That is to say, an error theorist and I have equally parsimonious ontologies. How can this be, given that I think that there are numbers and the error theorist disagrees? My response is that the error theorist is missing something about the ontological cost of there being numbers: they come for free. (Similarly, mereological sums come for free so long as their parts are around.) So although they refuse to add numbers to their ontologies, they are only refusing to add trivialities. Hence, there is no substantive ontological disagreement to be found. The error theorist will think there is a significant difference in our ontologies, as revealed by our disagreement over the truth of <There are numbers>; but this difference carries no ontological weight, when viewed from the correct truthmaking perspective.

This way of thinking about the ontology of mathematics strongly resonates with the view Rayo defends under the name "trivialism." He writes:

> Trivialism is the view that true sentences of pure mathematics have trivial truth-conditions (and that false sentences of pure mathematics have trivial falsity-conditions). According to the trivialist, *nothing* is required of the world in order for the truth-conditions of a mathematical truth to be satisfied: there is no intelligible possibility that the world would need to steer clear of in order to cooperate with the demands of mathematical truth. This means, in particular, that there is no need to go to the world to check whether any requirements have been met in order to determine whether a given mathematical truth is true. So once one gets clear about the sentence's truth-conditions – clear enough to know that they are trivial – one has done all that needs to be done to establish the sentence's truth. (2009: 240)

I don't put my view in terms of truth-conditions, since I want to stay clear of semantic matters and their contentious relationship to metaphysical claims. Otherwise, I see nothing in Rayo's view that is incongruent with my own.[16] Rayo does suggest that his trivialism is consistent with at least some forms of Platonism – he calls the defenders of such views "subtle Platonists," and attributes the moniker to Wright (1983). (Rayo himself embraces "Trivialist Platonism" in his 2013 book.) My reading of subtle Platonism is that it is a Platonism that has no ontological import. It might

[16] Heil (2012: 171–176) also endorses Rayo's perspective in reference to truthmaking and mathematics.

"commit" to numbers where some other views are reluctant, but at the same time it should admit that the commitment is trivial. I would suggest reserving "Platonism" for views with more ontological baggage, but I shall not dispute any further about a word.

I hope to have articulated my position regarding truthmaking and mathematical truth as clearly as possible, and shown how it connects to other ongoing projects in the philosophy of mathematics. Its advantages are easy to appreciate. It comes at zero ontological cost (in contrast with more robust forms of Platonism), but is not revisionary regarding mathematics (in contrast to error theory and fictionalism). It doesn't reject the truth of even the most elementary of mathematical statements, but suffers no ontological consequences as a resort. Nor does it engage in the contentious "rewriting" of mathematics, as do views that reinterpret mathematical claims as really being about, say, possibilities (e.g., Putnam 1967a and Armstrong 2004: 117). Its fortunes are perhaps tied to the ultimate success of projects like neo-Fregeanism and Rayo's trivialism. But its ontological advantages (not to mention its epistemological ones, though I shall set those aside) are grand enough to motivate further exploration of those topics. Finally, I hope to have demonstrated that this ontologically innocent take on mathematical truth has done its full ontological due diligence. Though I grant mathematical truths no truthmakers beyond their trivial ones, I have explained in detail why this attitude is perfectly appropriate. Card-carrying fans of truthmaking are not forced into a dilemma between error theory and rigorous Platonism simply in virtue of their allegiance to truthmaking.

To conclude this section, I would like to respond to possible objections against my view that arise in Baron's truthmaker-based defense of Platonism (2013d). Baron argues as follows. We should ontologically commit ourselves to whatever truthmakers we accept for everything we accept to be true (including our best scientific theories, for which mathematics is indispensable). The best account of what makes mathematical claims true is a Platonistic ontology. Thus, we should ontologically commit ourselves to Platonism. Naturally, I heartily accept the argument's first premise, and reject its second. Baron considers and responds to three possible objections to his premise, which I discuss in turn.

The first objection that might be made is that truthmakers for mathematical truths are easy to find, and so Platonic entities are not needed. After all, on my account of truthmaking, every object whatsoever counts as a truthmaker for all mathematical truths. While I accept this consequence, I have conceded that it shouldn't be satisfying for those who see

mathematical truth as being substantive, i.e., as a collection of synthetic truths dependent upon the world's ontology. That is to say, no one should think that a good job of ontological accounting has been done by offering an orphan sock as a truthmaker for Fermat's last theorem. One shouldn't, in effect, admit that an object is a trivial truthmaker, and then turn around and claim that it does a good job of ontological accounting. So I agree with Baron's assessment of this way of objecting to his argument.

Baron's second objection comes from those who do offer nontrivial truthmakers for mathematical claims, but in a nominalist-friendly way. The real truthmakers are not Platonic entities, but rather proofs, say, or certain physical systems. Baron's strategy for challenging these views is to question their ability to adopt a straightforward and nonrevisionary semantics for mathematical claims. "2 is an even prime number" appears to be about the object 2, and so any view that claims it's made true by something not involving 2 would appear forced into a revisionary account of the semantics of the sentence. I've tried to steer clear in this work about what implications truthmaking has for semantics, so I am disinclined to endorse or deny Baron's claim here. I do note some existing skepticism about taking at face value what the semantics of mathematical statements involves.[17] That said, my "nominalist" – assuming the label is appropriate – accepts that there is a number 2. That number ends up being an ontologically deflated entity, but perhaps is still suitable for the semantic purposes that Baron envisions.[18] And I add a friendly suggestion that views offering "surrogate" truthmakers for mathematical claims are likely to run into further trouble. For example, citing contingent objects as truthmakers for necessary truths seems unworkable. If proofs, for example, are nominalist-friendly entities, then presumably they are events of some sort, or perhaps written documents. To accept that mathematical truths are dependent on the existence of these contingent objects is to commit to an erroneous view of the modal status of mathematical claims. Their truth is "around" long before the proofs, and will be around long after; it's unclear how that's possible if they are ontologically dependent upon them.

Finally we come to Baron's third possible objection, which is the one that is closest to my own. As Baron notes, one might think that

[17] For instance, see Hofweber's work that challenges many philosophers' views about how mathematical language works (e.g., 2000, 2005, 2009). For views that are explicitly cautious about reading metaphysical claims off the surface of language, see Heil 2003, Cameron 2008c and 2010c, and Rayo 2009 and 2013.

[18] Azzouni (e.g., 2006), for instance, is happy to let ontologically deflated entities stand in reference relations.

truthmaking demands apply only to contingent truths, and so there is no theoretical need to explore what might make mathematical truths true, since they are all necessary.[19] My own view is close: substantive truthmaking demands apply only to synthetic truths, and so there is no need to explore what makes mathematical truths true, since they're analytic. Much of Baron's rebuttal to the objection focuses on Cameron's (2010c) particular stance on truthmakers for necessary truths. I deal with Cameron's view myself in the next section, and do not rely on it for my own defense of the analyticity of mathematics. But Baron offers some general reasons for skepticism about the view of anyone who, like myself, releases mathematical truth from needing nontrivial truthmakers.

First, Baron returns to the claim that any such view is committed to a nonuniform semantics. If "There are numbers" and "There are wallabies" are importantly different regarding truthmakers, then they must be importantly different regarding their semantics, appearances to the contrary. Again, I am staying neutral on the issue of what semantic implications follow from one's metaphysical views. I tend to side with those who think the two matters are independent of one another (see, e.g., Azzouni 2004, 2006, and 2010) but I am prepared to let the semantic chips fall as they may. Second, Baron points out that views like mine are required to treat mathematical truth as necessary, and so must dispute contingentist views like Colyvan's (e.g., 1998, 2000). Again, I accept the charge. According to Colyvan, treating mathematical truth and mathematical entities as contingent is the inevitable consequence of a thoroughgoing Quineanism. Perhaps so, but I am no Quinean. I do not believe that we should accept the truth of mathematics on the basis of its indispensability to science; mathematical truth stands on its own. One might, in fact, interpret a mathematical trivialism as envisioned by Rayo as an answer to the Quinean: here is an approach that accounts for why mathematical statements are true, and necessarily so. The prospects for mathematics are not tied directly to the fortunes of empirical science.

Baron's questions for the trivialist about mathematical truthmaking are fair, though not devastating.[20] The trivialist will, most likely, end up taking partisan stands on the issues of the semantics and modal status of

[19] Oftentimes truthmaker principles are stated in ways that are explicitly restricted to contingent truths. See, e.g., Armstrong 1969: 23, and 1989a: 9, Bourne 2006b: 2, Cheyne and Pigden 2006: 249, López de Sa and Zardini 2006: 154, and 2007: 242, Björnsson 2007: 3, Crisp 2007: 90, and Akiba 2011: 115.

[20] It's worth noting again that there is a sense in which trivialism about mathematics is orthogonal to Platonism, as Rayo points out. Since I accept that there are numbers, I might well be a Platonist by

mathematical judgments that will not fit with other defensible philosophies of mathematics. But the trivialist perspective is itself a defensible philosophy of mathematics, and one that has a lot of ontological support behind it. It offers a parsimonious ontology (nothing nontrivial at all!) for the grounds of mathematical truth, supports its theoretical autonomy, and is nonrevisionary regarding its modal and alethic status. And in no way does it question the legitimacy of truthmaker inquiry, when properly understood as ontological accounting.

11.4 Against Cameron's Trivialism

To conclude my defense of mathematical trivialism, I offer a critical look at Cameron's recent defense of the view in a truthmaking context (2010c; see also his 2008c). Cameron also finds inspiration in Rayo's views, though I think he draws the wrong implications for ontology and for truthmaking. In fact, I worry that his view can appear incoherent, and offer what I take to be the correct way of understanding truthmaking in the context of mathematical trivialism.

Cameron's main goal in his paper is to show how anyone who adopts the trivialist view about necessary truths thereby gains an explanation of their necessity. Any truth whose truth-conditions are trivially satisfied must be satisfied no matter what: in other words, from a truth being trivial we can infer that it must be true. Thus, the trivialist has an explanation of necessity. Whether all necessary truths are trivial in this way is of course contentious; theists should certainly balk at such a claim. I am sympathetic, as should be anyone who remains skeptical of the synthetic *a priori*.[21]

some uses of that word, albeit a trivial one. To me, Platonism vs. nominalism is an interesting ontological debate only when viewed from the nontrivialist perspective. On that debate, I side with the nominalist. In a trivialist context, Platonism vs. nominalism loses any ontological meaning. The trivialist Platonist cannot even find intelligible the claim that trivial numbers fail to exist. If Baron takes his arguments to support nontrivial Platonism, then I challenge his premises. If his interest is merely in defending trivialist Platonism, then I accept his conclusions. After all, I believe that numbers exist, and even that they (alongside everything else) make mathematical statements true. But these claims, I maintain, are all ontologically vacuous, and mark no genuine ontological disagreement with the nominalist.

[21] Cameron, like Rayo but unlike me, does not like talk of the analytic and synthetic. (See Rayo 2013: 35–38.) For Cameron, I suspect this is due to his suspicion of conventionalism (2010c: 403). It seems to me that the distinction I'm after in Chapter 7 between the analytic and synthetic is closely related, if not identical, to the trivial/nontrivial distinction employed by Cameron and Rayo. If so, perhaps they would still prefer to stick to their language, and dispense with the centuries of baggage associated with "analytic" and "synthetic." I hope the substance of my views is defensible; I care little about the labels, but I have no qualms regarding "analytic" and "synthetic."

My contention with Cameron lies with the implications for truthmaking that he draws from trivialism. First, I think he incorrectly describes Rayo's position, though it comes very close to language I myself used above: "the truth of any mathematical claim does not demand the existence of numbers, and it does not demand anything else, hence it does not demand anything at all" (2010c: 405). Rayo's trivialist does accept the existence of numbers; that's why Rayo identifies as a trivialist Platonist. I find it nearly impossible to deny that the truth of <Numbers exist> is committed to the existence of numbers. The correct way to describe Rayo is as thinking that the truth of mathematical claims does not demand the *nontrivial* existence of numbers. It *must* demand the (trivial) existence of numbers, because the matter of their failing to exist is unintelligible.[22]

Second, Cameron goes on to saddle the mathematical trivialist with what can appear to be an incoherent position: "she can recognize the truth of Platonist claims such as 'There are numbers', 'The number 2 exists', etc., but she may treat these simply as more claims whose truth makes no demands on the world, *a fortiori* whose truth does not demand that there be numbers, or the number 2, respectively" (2010c: 405). To the contrary: "There are numbers" cannot be true unless there are numbers. "The number 2 exists" cannot be true unless the number 2 exists. These claims, I hope, are among the least controversial made in this entire monograph. They involve disquotation, and nothing more. Nevertheless, Cameron maintains that I, by insisting on these innocuous claims from the T-schema, am "caught up in a bad view about how language works"; specifically, I am adopting some sort of Tractarian picture-theory that has language "mapping onto the structure of the world" (2010c: 408). However, I have not said one word about the "structure of the world" by insisting that "The number 2 exists" cannot be true unless the number 2 exists. (Talk of structure has been virtually absent from this entire treatise.) Nor have I committed to some grand Wittgensteinian theory about language. What I have done is just noticed the disquotational nature of "true." Everyone recognizes (or should recognize) that "true" serves as a device of disquotation (regardless of the further contentious issue as to whether that is *all* it does). The only way to divorce the truth of

[22] Cameron seems to glimpse the right way of describing Rayo (as a "soft Platonist"), though he doesn't actually claim that Rayo is a soft Platonist (2010c: 405, n. 4). In any event, Rayo's view *cannot* be understood without explicitly drawing the distinction between trivial and nontrivial existence.

"The number 2 exists" from the existence of the number 2 is to equivocate on "The number 2 exists."

That said, it's easy to reconstruct what Cameron should have said. The truth of "The number 2 exists" does not demand a nontrivial ontological commitment to the sort of entity that a (traditional, substantive, nonsubtle, hard, synthetic) Platonist posits. Or: the trivialist can commit to the truth of "The number 2 exists" (read in trivialist fashion) without committing to the existence of the number 2 (read in nontrivialist fashion). Or: the trivialist can commit to the truth of "The number 2 exists" without being "ontologically committed" to the number 2, where "ontological commitment" here means something to the effect of "commitment to an entity that necessarily comes at a cost in parsimony in the context of theory evaluation." All of these are coherent statements of the trivialist idea that do not rely on rejecting the disquotational feature of truth.

The trivialist's point is that accepting the truth of "There are numbers" – which, more or less, is just to accept that there are numbers – incurs no substantive ontological commitment. That is to say, when it comes to judging the relative merits of different ontologies vis-à-vis parsimony, one's trivial ontological commitments don't add anything to the picture; they come at no cost. It's not correct to say that the trivialist rejects the existence of numbers. Regardless of your views about what "ontological commitment" means or involves, committing to the truth of "Numbers exist" just is (or requires) committing to the existence of numbers. To say otherwise is to succumb to contradiction or equivocation. The issue is whether committing to the existence of numbers comes at any ontological cost: that's what trivialists and nontrivialists disagree about. I noted earlier that the error theorist who denies that there are numbers even in a trivial way is either attempting to express an unintelligible position, or fails at defending a leaner ontology, since an ontology without trivial numbers is no more parsimonious than an ontology with them. Error theorists must be revisionist about mathematics (according to them, 2 and 2 do not equal 4), and yet they gain no ontological advantage over the trivialist in so doing.

11.5 Conclusion

My argument in this chapter began with the claim that we should be nonrevisionary about mathematics, and therefore accept that mathematics is a science that offers us a bounty of truths. Those truths, it seems to me, straightforwardly entail that numbers exist. I have suggested that such a

commitment need not have substantial, consequential implications for ontology. I find this view more straightforward than the style of view one finds with Azzouni and Hofweber, where it's admitted that there are numbers, but then claimed that this commitment doesn't correlate with any commitment in one's ontology. Better to say that there is a commitment, albeit a trivial one. In so doing, I have admitted that part of our ontological inventories are reserved for "trivial" entities. These do no truthmaking work beyond the trivial truthmaking work that everything does. They are not, in other words, posited in order to serve a truthmaking purpose. They belong in our inventories just because the mathematicians (I presume) tell us that they do.

My commitment to trivial mathematical entities might, therefore, seem out of step with the general ontological methodology that I've advocated in this book.[23] That methodology says: start with the truths we accept, and then build an ontology by way of figuring out what's needed to make those truths true. Yet I have conceded that we don't "need" mathematical objects to make mathematics true. So why admit them into our ontological inventories? In reply, consider how the truthmaking dialectic works in paradigm cases. Suppose it's agreed that it's true that a certain rose is red. <The rose is red> is uncontroversially true, but it's controversial whether one of the following existentials is true: <There is a redness trope belonging to the rose> and <There is a state of affairs of the rose's being red>. These latter claims are not part of the "data" that fuel truthmaker theory. They are the result. Similarly, negative existentials and counterfactuals don't obviously require the existence of totalities, laws of nature, dispositions, or other sorts of entities that figure into familiar views about their truthmakers. Figuring out which of these things we should commit to is the hard work of truthmaker theory. But the claims we *start* with in mathematics already appear to be ontologically committing: there are prime numbers, even numbers, odd numbers, and plenty of others. So the question for me is not so much whether we must commit to numbers in our ontologies (that seems to be uncontroversially settled by the mathematical truths with which we began the investigation), but how we should understand the nature and costs of those commitments. My view is that those commitments are not to a realm of Platonic entities, but to abstracta that incur zero ontological cost.

My account of the nature of mathematical commitments has a number of theoretical advantages. It is more parsimonious than that of the

[23] Thanks go to Sam Baron for pushing me on this particular point.

traditional Platonist, who incurs a substantive commitment to Platonic entities to play a nontrivial truthmaking role for mathematical truths. Crucial to my break with the standard Platonist is my acknowledgment that mathematical truth is analytic. I haven't argued for that thesis here, and therefore I owe a debt to those philosophers of mathematics who are better equipped to motivate and defend that perspective. For those who do not embrace the analyticity of mathematics, tough roads lie ahead. These views cannot easily embrace my straightforward views about the nature of the truthmaking relation, and cannot accept that mathematical truths and their truthmakers are trivial. For the synthetic camp, 2 presumably makes true <2 exists> but not <4 exists>, and so a more discriminating truthmaking relation is called for.[24] I consider it an advantage of my view that it need not take on these theoretical burdens.

My contribution has been to show why my austere view about the ontology of mathematics is not shirking its ontological duties. It admits of just as much mathematical metaphysics as we need: an ontology of trivial mathematical objects. This view is superior to its more extravagant Platonist rival, and to error-theoretic and fictionalist accounts that reject the autonomy of mathematics for the prize of false parsimony: an ontology with trivial numbers is no less parsimonious than an ontology without. I return to the benefits of this trivialist perspective in the next chapter, where we shall encounter another kind of entity that enjoys (relative) trivial existence.

[24] A natural place to turn would be relevance logic, of the sort developed by Anderson and Belnap 1975.

CHAPTER 12

Fiction

Not much has been written about the ontology of fiction explicitly from the perspective of truthmaker theory. As a result, the topic provides a suitable test case for my preferred metaphysical methodology: can the tools of truthmaker theory be employed to effect progress in the metaphysical disputes that arise in the context of literary fictions? I believe that they can, and my goal in this chapter is to illustrate how thinking in terms of truthmakers is a useful way of navigating the questions that arise in connection with the existence of fictional characters. Though the views I defend by way of that methodology are by no means the exclusive province of truthmaker theory, they do demonstrate how metaphysical debates can be usefully pursued with the tools I've offered in the previous chapters. Sometimes the idea of truthmaking is left implicit when it comes to the arguments offered for views about fictional entities. Framing the debate in terms of truthmakers helps to demonstrate their continuity with other arguments in philosophy. In fact, in this chapter I aim to reveal some useful parallels between the ontology of fictional characters and the ontology of numbers.

In Section 10.4 I mentioned that truthmaker theory is at its most productive when it explores the ontological grounds for a relatively uncontentious body of truths. Asking about the truthmakers for moral truths, for example, is pointless from the perspective of those who adopt classical noncognitivism about moral judgments, which denies that they are truth-apt at all (e.g., Ayer 1952). In this chapter, I take up a truthmaking question for a set of claims that are nothing if not controversial. Specifically, I'm taking up the issue of truth in and about fiction, and what, if any, ontological grounds it accompanies. The stance I defend upholds the existence of both truths about fictions, and truthmakers to ground them. However, I shall argue that the truthmakers for truths about fiction are entirely supervenient on the truthmakers for other truths, and so come at no additional ontological cost to sensible metaphysics.

The range of opinions regarding truth in fiction was made manifest to me once while giving a talk. When asked on the fly about what the truthmakers might be for the claims made in fiction, I took a straw poll about the truth value of "Hamlet is Prince of Denmark." The room divided into three roughly equal camps: those who thought it true, those who thought it false, and those who judged it to be neither true nor false. All three perspectives are easy to appreciate. Hamlet, after all, was portrayed as a Danish prince – he wasn't the terrorism czar of Czechoslovakia or last year's Daytona 500 champion. But then again, one won't find Hamlet on any list of the royal genealogies of Scandinavia. Furthermore, if "Hamlet" is a nondenoting name, perhaps sentences that employ it aren't even in the business of being true or false.

The attitude I shall adopt in this chapter is rather liberal; I won't be stingy about finding truths in and about fiction. I take it to be the case that there is an obvious sense in which it's true that Hamlet doesn't exist. I also take it to be the case that there's a sense in which Hamlet clearly does exist. What I shall not be doing in this chapter is offering analyses of sentences like "Hamlet is Prince of Denmark" (*à la* Lewis 1978, say) in the hopes of uncovering their "true logical form," whatever that might come to. There will be no discussion of fiction operators, paraphrases, or pretense theories. I am not much interested in the language of fictional discourse per se. Instead, I am engaging the metaphysical question of what grounds the various facts that involve fiction and fictional characters, and what difference that should make to our ontological views.

I begin by surveying some of the basic positions and stances one might take regarding the alethic and metaphysical issues related to fiction.[1] I then offer my own (admittedly noncomprehensive) approach to the truthmakers for the truths related to fiction. Though the topic of truthmaking and fiction has only received minimal explicit attention, the view I favor is most in line with Amie Thomasson's (1996, 1999) artifactual theory that takes fictional characters to be dependently existing abstract beings. I finish the chapter by downplaying the ontological costs that accompany this view, and showing how views like Thomasson's about fictional characters resonate with the trivialist view about mathematics that I defended in Chapter 11.

[1] My remarks shall be brief and far from comprehensive, given the depth of discussion on these issues over the last century; Friend (2007) and Livingston and Sauchelli (2011) are excellent concise introductions to some of the topics involved. While the literature on the metaphysics of fictional objects is immense, the discussion of it in the particular context of truthmaking is quite small. See, in particular, Kroon 2000, Livingston and Sauchelli 2011, Cameron 2012, and Baron et al. (in press).

12.1 Truth and Fiction

Major Major Major Major, who bore a sickly resemblance to Henry Fonda almost from the moment of his birth, was promoted to the rank of Major by an IBM machine with a sense of humor. When Milo Minderbinder sends him a broiled lobster, he consumes it alongside a Roquefort salad, two frozen éclairs, and a guilty conscience.

Of course, Major Major and Milo Minderbinder are not real; Joseph Heller invented them in the 1950s to be characters in his novel *Catch-22*. But having done so, he established that Major Major resembles Henry Fonda, and that Minderbinder is a war profiteer who runs the mess hall and M & M Enterprises. Furthermore, whereas Major Major is a symbol for hollow and inept bureaucracy, Milo Minderbinder is a satirical figure who represents unfettered capitalist greed. Claims such as these would hardly give anyone pause – at least anyone not already steeped in the philosophical puzzles surrounding fiction and fictional characters. So I shall not be systematically denying these sorts of ordinary claims that can be made in regard to fictions. When we appear to have landed on a truth about or within a fiction, I shall be querying what sort of ontological ground, if any, it needs. Questions of linguistic or semantic analysis will take a backseat.

Consider first Major Major. On the one hand, Major Major is a fictional character, the creation of Joseph Heller. He has various features: he once believed his name was "Caleb," his mother died while he was an infant, and he frequently signs documents using "Washington Irving." But on the other hand, Major Major is a creature of fiction, an imaginary object. Which is to say, Major Major doesn't exist at all. At this point, philosophers see conflict arising between these various claims, and in response deploy various arguments and technical apparatus. It might be claimed, for instance, that "Major Major exists" is false, owing to its subject being a made-up person. In that case, how do we account for the fact that it seems to be entailed by "Major Major is a character in *Catch-22*," which is plain empirical fact? Here philosophers might offer a paraphrase of the latter into a sentence that is more uncontentiously true. As for "Major Major resembles Henry Fonda," a claim made from "within" the novel, philosophers might claim, like van Inwagen, that it "does not represent an *attempt* at reference or description" and asserts nothing, leaving it neither true nor false (1977: 301). Or they might offer an analysis that embeds it within a fiction operator: in the fiction of *Catch-22*, Major Major resembles Henry Fonda. Then this sentence might in

turn be analyzed as being true, roughly, if and only if it would be true according to the overt beliefs of the community in which the goings-on of *Catch-22* are told as known fact rather than fiction (Lewis 1978: 45).

As I announced, I take a liberal stance on truths regarding fiction. In particular, I think we can easily make sense of seemingly contradictory things being true. Major Major isn't real, and yet he is. It's not difficult to understand the different claims made here. There is no human being who ever existed that is identical to the character described in Heller's novel. Henry Fonda is real; Major Major isn't. But Major Major, at the same time, is a real character, invented by Heller and featured in the novel. Major Major is an actual character from an actual novel, unlike characters that have never been invented for novels that have never been written. The very real canons of literature include Major Major; they don't include Minor Minor, seeing as "Minor Minor" is something I just made up that doesn't name anything. There are empirical facts about Major Major: he appears in *Catch-22*, but not its sequel *Closing Time*. There are also facts about him within the universe of the novel, such as his being human and being unfortunately named. Still, we might nevertheless wonder: is the sentence "Major Major is human" true? He can't be found in the biological history of the world, and yet it's not the case that Heller depicted him as being anything other than human. Van Inwagen (1977) would hold that Major Major isn't human, since he is a theoretical entity, a "creature of fiction"; nevertheless, being human is ascribed to Major Major, and this ascription is what we have in mind when we contemplate the sense in which Major Major is human. For my purposes, it doesn't matter what we should say about the *sentence* "Major Major is human."[2] What seems clear to me is that we might use it to express at least two different and utterly familiar thoughts, one of which is true, and one of which is false. My concern is with what it is that provides those thoughts with their truth-value.

12.2 Truthmakers and Fiction

The claims that Major Major and Milo Minderbinder do not reside among the actual humans in the universe are, most likely, negative existential

[2] Thomasson (2003a: 140) concedes that in her view, "Major Major is human" isn't "literally true" because, being abstract, Major Major is not a member of our species. She takes this to be a strike against her hopes to preserve ordinary thinking about fictional characters as far as possible. I would advise, by contrast, taking "Major Major is human" as ambiguous, something we can use to express one thought that is commonsensically true, and another that is commonsensically false. Hence, I deny that Yagisawa's "devastatingly simple" objection along these lines is at all devastating (2001: 169–170).

truths, truths about what doesn't exist. As such, they must be handled with care (recall Section 4.2), but need not introduce any novel truthmaking considerations. Of more immediate interest are the positive things that can be said about them. These include the truths about them *within* the fiction of *Catch-22* (that Major Major resembles Henry Fonda), and also the truths that involve our metafictional discourse about them (that Milo Minderbinder is a character in both *Catch-22* and *Closing Time*). Despite being claims about fictional and therefore imaginary beings, it still strikes me that they owe their truth to the world. Had Heller never composed his novels, it wouldn't have been true that Milo Minderbinder is a repeat character in the two books. If Heller hadn't had quite his particular sense of humor, then Major Major would not have ended up with a sickly resemblance to the star of *Twelve Angry Men*.

Because these truths in and about fiction make contingent, positive claims about the world, we need to consider what difference they ought to make for our overall ontological worldview. Or so I think. An alternative, skeptical response has been offered by Frederick Kroon:

> In my view, it is better simply to say that [truths involving fiction] are of course made true by "facts" about the world (including such "facts" as: there is no one called "Hamlet" whose exploits are reliably recorded in the play *Hamlet*), but that there is no reason to think of these as anything more than quasi-facts. Better, that is, to accept talk of such "facts," but deny that they are the genuine referents of nominalized constructions that describe what makes the relevant statements true in the truthmaker sense. That way we can happily go along with saying that such statements are made true by "facts" about the world, while remaining sceptical that they have genuine truthmakers. (2000: 209)

To the contrary, insisting on the language of truthmaking while denying it any substance leads only to confusion and obfuscation. Kroon's tactic here is of a kind with the deflationary truthmaking that I contested in Section 5.3. The deflationist thinks that the ambitions of truthmaker theory (i.e., discovering and defending an ontological worldview) are easily satisfied, and without recourse to ontology. (If there is recourse to some ontology, then the deflationary critics are, despite their protests, sibling truthmaker theorists.) Kroon's view is most clearly articulated by the following: there are truths such as that expressed by "Hamlet is a fictional character," but they're not made true. But if so, they must be either brute, fundamental truths, or supervenience-respecting truthmaker gaps. Kroon doesn't defend either of these perspectives – he opts instead to use the language of truthmaking but embed it within scare quotes – so it's unclear that he's

done his ontological due diligence. A deflationary reply to a truthmaking inquiry is no reply at all.

Setting aside the deflationary perspective, I can imagine a variety of substantive positions that might be offered. (Recall that there has been very little explicit discussion about truthmaking and fiction.) First up is the Meinongian approach (e.g., Parsons 1980). Roughly, Meinongians believe that there are nonexistent objects, among them fictional characters like Major Major and Milo Minderbinder. Though they do not exist, nonexistents manage to have properties and some form of being ("subsistence," say). Meinongians take on an ontological commitment to such entities, in spite of believing them not to exist. Because this view requires at least two fundamental species of "being," alternative views that can do without it are, *ceteris paribus*, preferable. Furthermore, Meinongians typically must reject the idea that fictional characters are the creations of their authors; since they are already "out there," authors merely discover and popularize them (see, e.g., Zalta 1983). I find this consequence – shared by any view that treats fictional characters as necessarily existing abstract objects – problematic in and of itself, in addition to the fact that it collapses the ontological distinction between real fictional characters (Major Major) and unreal ones (Minor Minor). Though none of these considerations suffices to refute the view (rarely if ever does such a state of affairs arise in metaphysics), I shall have no more to say about Meinongian views.[3]

An alternative approach looks for truthmakers that are more material, and therefore consistent with a physicalist metaphysics. Two views appear to be obvious starting points. First, we might think of the creative acts that led to various fictional characters as being the truthmakers for the truths about them. On such a view, it was Heller's act, say, of writing the dependent clause "to whom he bore a sickly resemblance" in reference to Major Major and Henry Fonda that makes it true that Major Major bore a sickly resemblance to Henry Fonda. That Major Major exists at all is due to the event of Heller's thinking up such a character and putting its story into the novel. Likewise, it was Heller's composing of the novels that makes it true that Milo Minderbinder, but not Major Major, is a character in both *Catch-22* and its sequel. Whether this view is tenable depends on whether one embraces events of this sort into one's ontology; I'm not

[3] See Thomasson (1999) and Livingston and Sauchelli (2011) for more detailed discussion and critique of the Meinongian view. In general, the topic of Meinongianism arises only rarely in the context of truthmaking. For a sympathetic discussion, see Casati and Fujikawa 2016.

going to take a particular stand on that question, though it strikes me as being metaphysically respectable.

The second "physicalist" point of view looks not to creative acts, but to the physical results of those acts: the actual printed copies of *Catch-22* and *Closing Time*, plus, perhaps, Heller's drafts of them, audio recordings of the books, disks that carry electronic versions of the books, and copies of the film and television adaptations. Because these things exist, the various truths about Major Major and the members of his squadron are true (plus many of our true metafictional claims about them).

I have no objections to these particular ontological posits in and of themselves. Heller's acts of creation are part and parcel of the universe, as is the hardback copy of *Catch-22* on my bookshelf. There is some reason to doubt that they provide the right sort of ontological grounds for truths in and about fiction, however. I shall consider two objections. The first is, I think, unsatisfactory, but the second sufficiently pressing to motivate us to look for another view.

Here again is Kroon – one of the few to explicitly take up the topics of fiction and truthmaking – objecting to the sorts of physicalist truthmaking accounts I have described:

> Shakespeare and his doings surely do not provide the ontological grounds for the truth of "Hamlet exists" and "Hamlet is a prince," but at most the causal grounds. Assuming there are such "things" as creative acts, the official definition of "truthmaker" cannot in such cases distinguish between the ontological and the causal grounds of truth. (2000: 200)

The objection is that creative acts may cause the truth of "Hamlet is a prince," but do not ontologically ground it – i.e., make it true. I agree with Kroon that it's worthwhile to distinguish ontological and causal grounds. Whether these are mutually exclusive categories is an open question, however, and Kroon offers no reason to close it. Kroon likens the example to the kinds of cases that challenge the sufficiency of necessitation for truthmaking (recall Section 3.3.1). Shakespeare composing a play about the prince of Denmark might be sufficient to *guarantee* that it's true that Hamlet is a prince, though it does not *make* it true. As far as I can tell, Kroon doesn't argue for this claim, and presumably takes it to be obvious. I have already argued for why we shouldn't accept that these kinds of cases are counterexamples to the sufficiency of necessitation for truthmaking. Furthermore, the lack of relevance that drives other purported counterexamples (my copy of *Catch-22* and the truth of <22 divided by 2 is 11>, for example) isn't obviously present here. Shakespeare and his pen would

seem, *prima facie*, to be quite relevant to what's true about the melancholy prince. Besides, it's unclear what Kroon has in mind when he makes claims about how truth can be caused. The more standardly accepted view is that truthmaking and causality are indeed different kinds of grounding, but that truth doesn't have causal grounds at all – it has truthmaking grounds. It's a category mistake to think that truths have causal grounds. In admitting that Shakespeare's creative acts "caused" the truth of "Hamlet is a prince," I suspect Kroon admits too much: the fact he's latching on to is just the truthmaking fact, if it is one. Hamlet has his features in virtue of Shakespeare's creative acts.

The second objection, which I take to be more serious, draws on the observation that fictional characters can go out of existence. This claim informs Thomasson's view on fictional objects, as when she writes that "We treat literary tales as entities that can cease to exist, that at times take special efforts and government projects to preserve ... or that may be destroyed by a temperamental author burning unpublished manuscripts" (1999: 9). For instance, the female lead of Melville's lost *The Isle of the Cross* might be thought to exist no longer, unlike Ahab and Ishmael who live on to tell their tales. If fictional characters, like their nonfictional counterparts, can go out of existence, then the physicalist truthmakers on offer are problematic. Heller's creative act was of limited duration – the existence of Major Major and Milo Minderbinder have far outlasted it. If his creative act from the 1950s is sufficient to make it true in 2019 that Major Major and Milo Minderbinder exist, then it ought to be sufficient to make it true in 3019 that Major Major and Milo Minderbinder exist. But they might have gone out of existence by then, so the creative act itself is ill suited to be the ontological grounds for truths about them, lest we face a contradictory state of affairs in which <Major Major exists in 3019> is made true though false.

Similarly, it's possible – at least in Thomasson's view – that the characters could go out of existence, even if a copy of *Catch-22* manages to stick around until 3019. The reason, she maintains, is that

> A literary work is not a mere bunch of marks on a page but instead is an intersubjectively accessible recounting of a story by means of a public language. ... A literary work as such can exist only as long as there are some individuals who have the language capacities and background assumptions they need to read and understand it. (1999: 11)

If my copy of *Catch-22* survives until 3019, though the possibility for understanding it does not, then the literary work, and all the characters

within, no longer exist. If this line of reasoning is correct, then physical copies of a literary work are not the correct ontological ground for truths about fiction, since their existence does not guarantee the truth of the facts in question.

To respond to this concern, I envision two replies, both of which I find satisfactory, and complementary. First, if the physical manifestations of the fictional work are not sufficient to guarantee the truths involved, then perhaps, in addition, we need to posit the fictional characters themselves. Heller's creative act doesn't make it true that Major Major used to believe his name was Caleb; rather, Heller's creative act creates Major Major, the character together with all his properties. The fictional character himself, then, is responsible for the truths about him, just as Heller himself is responsible for the truths about Heller. On this view, it's not Heller's creative act that makes true the various facts about his creations; it's the creations themselves. In adopting this view, one takes on an ontological commitment to fictional characters, and in turn owes an account of what sort of thing they are.[4]

The second response looks not to the ontological category of fictional characters, but the sorts of things that are responsible for understanding fictional works in the first place. The concern, again, is that fictional characters are sustained by the possibility of understanding their stories. When that possibility disappears, so too do the characters. What this idea suggests is that what ultimately makes it true that Hamlet is prince of Denmark is not the fictional character Hamlet, but the mental states that exist and make possible continued thought about Hamlet. Shakespeare was the first to have such mental states about Hamlet,[5] and enabled others to have similar ones by writing down Hamlet's stories, sharing them, and having them performed, thereby making it possible for others to think about Hamlet and his goings-on. Today, as a result of elaborate causal chains involving memories, copies of Shakespeare's texts, adaptations of the work, parodies, and plenty else, we continue to be able to think about Hamlet's actions and inactions in response to learning of his father's murder. For the fictional character Hamlet to cease to exist, those causal chains must come to a halt: memories must fade, and the copies of the work – or the capacity to understand them – must vanish. If these sorts of

[4] For such views, see van Inwagen 1977, Searle 1979, Schiffer 1996, Salmon 1998, Thomasson 1999, Voltolini 2006, and Kripke 2013.

[5] Unless Shakespeare borrowed the character from an earlier text, in which case thoughts of Hamlet originated with that earlier playwright.

things are what sustain the existence of Hamlet, then we might as well say that they are the truthmakers for the truths about Hamlet. Should they cease to exist, it will no longer be true that Hamlet is prince of Denmark.

The reason I say that these two responses are complementary is that there is no conflict in accepting them both. When Heller came up with the character of Major Major, and decided to make him resemble Henry Fonda, that creative act established that it's true that Major Major resembles Henry Fonda. It remained true in virtue of Heller's continued mental representation of Major Major as resembling Henry Fonda, and continues to be true in virtue of everything in the world that continues to enable Heller's stories to be understood. But all of those creative acts, mental representations, and abilities to understand Heller's work also suffice to keep the fictional character Major Major in existence, along with the properties that he has. And if Major Major and his properties all exist, then they will also suffice to make it true that Major Major resembles Henry Fonda. Since there is no problem in accepting multiple truthmakers for a given truth, there is no problem with accepting that both fictional characters and the things upon which they depend are truthmakers for truths in and about fiction.

Now, one way of resisting my attitude here is found in Ross Cameron's defense of nominalism with respect to fictional characters (2012). In Cameron's view, the truthmakers for truths like <Major Major bore a sickly resemblance to Henry Fonda> are the "interpretive acts" on the part of literary readers. Here is his view at work:

> I have in front of me a bound bunch of printed pages, the first of which has the string of letters "The Hobbit, by J.R.R. Tolkien" on it. I engage with this entity by interpreting the strings of letters printed throughout it in a certain way. My act of interpretation makes it true that there is a work of fiction; that I interpret the fiction as involving the character Bilbo Baggins makes it true that Bilbo exists. No more is needed of the world to ensure that the fictional character Bilbo exists. (2012: 193)

Cameron focuses on the act of interpretation as the truthmaker, rather than the mental states that make that interpretation possible. However, that disagreement isn't of great significance. (I suspect it faces a problem similar to the one discussed above about characters going out of existence.) What does matter is how Cameron defends his position as being consistent with nominalism about abstract objects. In spite of granting that <Bilbo exists> is true, and even that Bilbo is an abstract entity, Cameron maintains that he is a nominalist nevertheless. "It is true that there are fictions, and fictional characters, and such things are abstract," Cameron

contends (2012: 192). Yet, he goes on, "Nominalist scruples should not be upset by the mere existence of abstracta, provided their being is grounded in an ontology of concreta" (2012: 193). In Cameron's view, there are abstracta, including fictional characters, but these entities are not fundamental. Being derivative, they are not objects to which one is ontologically committed; nor are they fit to be truthmakers. Hence, Cameron would say that while <Major Major is a fictional character that exists> is true, he is not ontologically committed to any abstract entity, though he accepts that Major Major, an abstract entity, exists.

Though Cameron must deny that Major Major makes true <Major Major exists> (for only fundamentalia can be truthmakers in his view), it's not clear to me that we have any substantive ontological disagreement. That is to say, once our different metaontological perspectives are neutralized, we don't appear to disagree about what the facts are. In my view, anything that you take to exist belongs to your ontological inventory. Cameron and I agree that Major Major exists, so I see no ontological dispute between us on that score. Cameron has in mind the idea that one's ontological inventory is exhausted by what one takes to be fundamental: derivative existents are irrelevant to ontology. He denies that Major Major is fundamental, which is why he takes himself not to be ontologically committed to him. I haven't claimed that Major Major is fundamental either, so it's unclear what is left for us to disagree about. He denies that Major Major can be a truthmaker, but again this is just a consequence of his preferred meta-ontological stance.

Cameron's view on ontology-as-truthmaking-solely-by-fundamentalia finds nothing of ontological interest among the nonfundamental aspects of the universe. Furthermore, it leads him to the view that adding nonfundamental entities to the universe comes at no ontological cost. I already articulated my suspicion of this perspective in the Introduction and Section 1.3, so I won't repeat myself here.[6] What I will add is my skepticism that Cameron's metaontological perspective allows him to preserve the spirit of nominalism, which is his objective. For Cameron, nominalism is the view that no abstract object exists fundamentally. Because Cameron's abstracta are all derivative, he finds their existence compatible with nominalism. I suspect, to the contrary, that there is more to nominalism than a view about what the fundamental objects are. Nominalists, traditionally, reject

[6] I will note that I prefer this incarnation of Cameron's view to his other view that distinguishes between things that exist with "real being" and things that exist without, for this appears to double down on Meinongianism rather than fundamentality (2010b: 250).

the existence of abstracta altogether: their concern is with finding one mode of being *tout court*, not just one mode of fundamental being. I'm happy to presume for present purposes that there is a debate to be had as to what sorts of entities are fundamental. But it's a mistake to regard objections to abstracta as being, across the board, nothing more than objections to abstracta being fundamental. Realists might think that some or all abstract objects are fundamental, but that's a further thesis. The focus on the fundamental is certainly a fact of early twenty-first century metaphysics, but it's unduly Whiggish to think that fundamentality has been the key to the realism/nominalism debate all along.

In my view, then, we should not be stingy about accepting that what appear to be straightforward truths involving fiction are indeed true. That is to say, our philosophical inclinations – including, especially, our metaphysical and ontological dispositions – should not drive us to reject as false claims that we would ordinarily otherwise take to be true.[7] Hamlet is prince of Denmark. That's one way he is; he's not the queen of Sweden. One might be suspicious of the truth of <Hamlet is prince of Denmark> if one takes it to require a truthmaker that is not currently dreamt of within one's philosophy. What I am suggesting is that the kinds of truthmakers that would appear to be perfectly sufficient for truths in fiction – those connected to the processes of creation and interpretation – are not at all metaphysically suspicious. But those objects also guarantee that there are further objects: fictional characters. These are equally good truthmakers, and there is no good reason to deny them that status.

It might still be thought, however, that fictional characters are metaphysically suspicious: creatures of darkness that it would be better, *ceteris paribus*, to do without (e.g., Brock 2010). Furthermore, given that I've suggested that the world's ontology related to the creation and interpretation of fiction is truthmaker enough for truths involving fiction, it might seem superfluous and indeed ontologically irresponsible to add fictional characters into the mix. This objection, it seems to me, has been sufficiently addressed in the literature, so I will not recapitulate it or its responses at length.[8] What will be worth exploring, though, is how the best response to this objection coheres well with the perspective I offered earlier on the ontology of mathematics. What I hope to offer is a further defense of fictional characters that amplifies the idea that fictional characters, like numbers, are an ontological "addition" that comes at no extra ontological cost.

[7] For an opposing view on this point, see Everett 2013.

[8] See, e.g., Thomasson 2003a and 2003b.

12.3 From Fictions to Numbers

The best response to those suspicious of fictional characters is to stress how minimal the commitment to fictional characters really is. Thomasson articulates this point by arguing that her opponents – including both those who deny that there are fictional characters and those who take them to be either Platonic or nonexistent entities – have an inflated sense of what it takes for there to be fictional characters:

> It is my suspicion that both sides in the debate over fictional characters have tended to overestimate the conditions that it would take for there to be fictional characters – with one side thinking those conditions (whether they involve the existence of possible, nonexistent or imaginary people, abstract person-kinds, or what not) are met, and the other denying that those conditions are met, and so denying that there are any fictional characters. . . . Once we acknowledge how minimal the conditions are that are actually required for there to be fictional characters in the perfectly ordinary sense, it is almost irresistible to say that there are fictional characters – that indeed, even those who seek to deny them have unwittingly had all it takes to have them all along. (2003a: 156)

Thomasson, in effect, argues that it is those who are skeptical of fictional characters that take them too seriously, ontologically speaking. All it takes for there to be fictional characters is for authors to write stories involving those characters. Since the latter surely takes place, it is equally assured that there are fictional characters. What ensures that the acts of authors bring into being fictional characters is "the ordinary concept of fictional characters enshrined in the practices of competent participants in critical discourse about literature, or those who ground the reference of the term 'fictional character'" (Thomasson 2003a: 154). Philosophical protest at the fact that this process results in an ontology of fictional characters rings hollow, as it can be motivated only by some overinflated sense of what is involved in the existence of fictional characters that does not defer to our practices of understanding fiction and fictional creation.[9] Nothing in this process of fictional creation requires there to be any *sui generis* or fundamental entities called "fictional characters," Platonic beings, or puzzling (if not paradoxical) nonexistent beings.

In Chapter 11, I defended a trivialist perspective on mathematics. That view, again, centers on the idea that the conditions of mathematical truth

[9] Whether these practices are sufficiently developed, systematic, and coherent to ground the process of fictional creation is a further question, of course (see Livingston and Sauchelli 2011: 343–344). Thomasson presumes it is, but it's reasonable to question this claim.

are trivially satisfied. To entertain the thought that there are no numbers, for instance, is simply unintelligible. So while it is true that there are numbers – and perhaps even true that those numbers are truthmakers – this commitment in and of itself does not require a (robust) Platonistic ontology of numbers. The trivialist view, if defensible, shows that the notion of "mathematical existence" is incredibly minimal: it's trivial, in fact. Here I see a point of harmony with Thomasson-style views about fictional characters that take them to be contingent, created abstract entities. Thomasson's idea is that once authorial acts of creation take place (and the interpretation of that creation continues), nothing more is required for there to be fictional characters. Fictional characters are dependent on those creative acts, and nothing more. One way to put that point, then, is that the existence of fictional characters is trivial *relative to* those creative acts (cf. Thomasson 2015a: 259). Fictional characters are not trivial *tout court*, as numbers are; they are, after all, contingent creations of their authors. But their existence is trivial – guaranteed – given the creative acts and ongoing interpretations.[10]

I do not take from this similarity that mathematical objects turn out, on reflection, to themselves be a kind of fictional character, or any other kind of fiction for that matter. Fictional characters are contingent creations; numbers are no such thing. Yet there is, I hope, illumination to be found in the idea that mathematical entities are a kind of limit case. The existence of fictional characters is trivial, relative to the relevant and ongoing creative and interpretive acts. The existence of numbers, meanwhile, is trivial relative to anything whatsoever. The world doesn't need to be any way in order for there to be numbers. Numbers are, thus, necessary and mind-independent.

One other point of commonality between numbers and fictional characters is their abstract character. If all abstracta conform to their mold – that is to say, their existence is either purely trivial, or trivial with respect to other non-abstracta – then perhaps we have an argument for the legitimacy of a modest form of antinominalism, but one that doesn't rise to the level of traditional Platonism. ("Nominalism" here, of course, refers not to the rejection of universals, but of abstract objects.) There are abstract objects, but they represent no substantive ontological commitment over and above the nonabstract elements of the universe. There are such abstracta – there

[10] Close at hand here are Thomasson's broader views about the "easy" approach to ontology, developed in great detail in her 2015b. I have great sympathy for many aspects of this project, but cannot here engage in a full assessment and comparison of our views.

must be such things – but they simply come along with the concrete denizens of the universe. (Or they just simply come along, as with numbers.) This more modest form of antinominalism is simply inevitable in the eyes of its defenders. To defend a strict nominalism that rejects even these (relatively) trivial abstracta is to adhere to a false sense of parsimony (cf. Thomasson 1999: chapter 9). If Y necessarily accompanies X, then an ontology with X but not Y is no leaner than an ontology with both X and Y together. The ontology without Y may not even be coherent.

Perhaps I have ultimately ended up defending the perspective offered by Cameron (2012) that I criticized earlier in this chapter. Cameron's nominalist adheres to the thesis that no abstracta are fundamental. If fundamentality for abstracta requires existence that is never trivial (relativized or not), then our two perspectives are in harmony with one another. I hesitate to assert that traditional nominalists should be happy with the modest view that there are abstracta, but they are trivial relative to non-abstracta (or just flat-out trivial). After all, the view is committed to the existence of abstract objects, which have usually been thought to be, in and of themselves, metaphysically suspect entities. Hence, I don't automatically count myself and Thomasson as nominalists, as Cameron might be compelled to do. I certainly take the view I have offered here to be ontologically committed to abstracta such as numbers and fictional characters; I find it misleading to speak of objects which one takes to exist but not be ontologically committed to. This way of speaking may just be, to my ears, an infelicity regarding how "ontological commitment" is used. But I do think it can be a misleading infelicity. Some ontological commitments come at no cost, theoretically speaking. That's the idea behind trivialism and Thomasson's view of fictional characters. But that is not to deny that they are ontological commitments nevertheless. Whether full-blooded nominalists would tolerate such abstracta is an open question. At the very least, it seems to me that recognizing the possibility that abstracta might be merely trivial additions to our ontology lessens the appeal behind thoroughgoing, traditional nominalism against all forms of abstracta.

Conclusion
Building an Ontology

The goal of the theory of truthmaking is ontological accounting. Its fundamental task is to ensure that our ontological ducks are in a row. As I've hoped to show, truthmaking does not in and of itself pave the way for one particular ontological view; truthmaking is better thought of as a set of tools for defending ontological views, rather than being or requiring a particular partisan view about ontology. Furthermore, my first ambition in these pages has been methodological: to show how to put truthmaker theory to work, and what clarity it can bring to various philosophical debates and projects. That said, I have also defended various contentious metaphysical positions along the way, and in so doing put that methodology to work. I shall conclude by putting together a start of what I take to be a sensible metaphysical view.

The first partisan stance I defended was against a strict form of nominalism that finds no ontological basis whatsoever for the possession of properties. Those who adopt realism about universals or tropes have on hand ontological grounds for understanding the basis for the contingent predicative truths about the universe. Those who do without, I argued, face the problem of accepting too many primitive facts into their worldview ("ostrich" nominalists), or weakening the point of ontological investigation (defenders of "weak supervenience" like Lewis). The ontological gains in adopting a stricter form of nominalism (that also rejects tropes) come at too great a theoretical sacrifice. So, despite my reservations and nominalist sympathies, I believe that serious engagement with truthmaking and the ideas behind it lead to some form of realism about either universals or tropes.

Similarly, I adopted a more "inflationist" perspective when it came to the ontology of the past. Truthmaking arguments do place significant pressure on presentist ontologies that aim to make do without any recourse to the existence of fully past entities. The leanest metaphysical perspective, ontologically speaking, is unsatisfactory, and thinking about truthmaking

reveals why that is. Presentists – in a move similar to that of the ostrich nominalists – can shirk the burden of offering past truthmakers only by draining the project of ontology of its scope and importance. Though a voluminous literature has arisen in response to this sort of truthmaking critique, it strikes me that the original truthmaking objection to presentism is fundamentally sound.

Between my defenses of realism about properties and eternalism in the theory of time, it might be thought that truthmaking does, after all, lead to a thoroughgoing rejection of desert landscapes and what appears to many to be an inflated ontological worldview. To those critics, I hope my later chapters on mathematics and fiction were more palatable. Though I happily allowed numbers and fictional characters into my ontology, I argued that doing so came at no ontological cost. Such entities are either entirely trivial, or costlessly accompany other perfectly acceptable ontological posits. Again, framing these debates in terms of truthmaking, has, I believe, led to some fruitful metaphysical results, and they are not entirely inflationary and substantive.

The ontological worldview I have offered would seem, then, to fall somewhere in the middle of the metaphysical spectrum. I have taken very seriously the metaphysics of properties and the past, but adopted a fairly deflationary view of mathematics and fiction. Extreme ostrich positions when it comes to properties and the past are untenable, but traditional Platonic views about numbers and fictional characters are also unnecessary. What I have offered is a thoroughly actualist ontology that finds room for properties and their bearers, and offers an accepting but deflating account of various abstracta. This is not the only worldview motivated by truthmaking, of course, but I take it to be a highly defensible one.

It might be objected that this route to an ontological worldview lacks systematicity. It certainly lacks the perspective of a Tractarian world of facts (Wittgenstein 1922) and other fact-based approaches to truthmaking (e.g., Pendlebury 1986 and 2010 and Jago 2011 and 2018) that provide a uniform and homogenous picture of what truthmakers are, and hence a uniform and homogenous picture of reality. The worldview defended here is certainly not one according to which the world is a totality of facts. In my view, truthmakers are just whatever there is, and the world is populated by a grand, heterogeneous variety of objects. I have long held sympathy with Peter Simons's attitude, as when he writes: "I deny that there is a separate ontological category of objects whose *peculiar* function it is to make truths true: truths are made true by sundry particular items from various ontological categories" (1992: 159). To think otherwise is to fall

into the trap of conceiving of truthmaking as being a separate ontological chore, of defending entities whose sole theoretical purpose is to fill the role of a truthmaker. As I see matters, to settle upon an ontology is to settle upon an account of truthmakers. Truthmaking provides a useful methodology for thinking about the business of ontology, rather than saddling it with some further task whose purpose is not at all clear (such as "explaining why truths are true").

Whether or not this lack of systematicity is attractive, and whether or not my particular ontological views are plausible, I hope that this foray into the theory of truthmaking has been philosophically productive. I do believe that regimenting some of our metaphysical thinking in terms of truthmaking is useful not only for furthering the debate regarding classic metaphysical topics like nominalism and presentism, but also for sorting out thorny topics such as realism and the very nature of truth itself.

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