

Grazer Philosophische Studien

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

LLPPA
B
808,5
G 738
V. 88
2013

FOUNDED BY

Rudolf Haller

EDITED BY

Johannes L. Brandl

Marian David

Maria E. Reicher

Leopold Stubenberg

VOL 88 - 2013

Rodopi

Amsterdam - New York, NY 2013

Die Herausgabe der GPS erfolgt mit Unterstützung des *Instituts für Philosophie der Universität Graz*, der *Forschungsstelle für Österreichische Philosophie, Graz*, und wird von folgenden Institutionen gefördert:

Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, Wien
Abteilung für Wissenschaft und Forschung des Amtes der
Steiermärkischen Landesregierung, Graz
Kulturreferat der Stadt Graz

Stadt **GRAZ** Wissenschaft

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of "ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence".

Lay out: Thomas Binder, Graz

ISBN: 978-90-420-3803-5

E-book ISBN: 978-94-012-1050-8

ISSN: 0165-9227

E-ISSN: 1875-6735

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Printed in The Netherlands

AN ABSOLUTE PRINCIPLE OF TRUTHMAKING

M. Oreste FIOCCO
University of California, Irvine

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to propose and defend an *absolute principle of truthmaking*, a *maximalist* one according to which *every* truth is made true by *something* in the world beyond itself. I maintain that an absolute principle must be true, that any weakened version is straightforwardly contradictory or incoherent. I criticize one principle of truthmaking (in terms of bald necessity) and articulate one in terms of the relation *in virtue of*. I then criticize other principles of truthmaking in light of the latter, for I contend that *in virtue of* has a role in the theory of truthmaking that is essential and ineluctable. That all true representations have a truthmaker as defined by the principle I articulate is the absolute principle of truthmaking I defend. The crux of the paper is the arguments I present in defense of this absolute principle. In defending it against familiar objections to maximalism, an account of the truthmakers that seem to ground all true representations emerges. I maintain that such truthmakers are *simple facts*. With the absolute principle and its corollary account of truthmakers, this paper contains the core of a comprehensive theory of truthmaking.

Introduction

If one understands the generic notion of *truth* to be that of the feature of representations that makes belief of those representations the appropriate goal of inquiry, then it is natural to think that a true representation is not so merely in itself, independently of anything else in the world. This idea motivates the acceptance of some sort of *truthmaking principle*, some version of the claim that true representations are made so, in part, by something beyond themselves. Although acceptance of this idea is widespread, there is much disagreement regarding the principle that best captures it and the scope of this principle. The purpose of this paper is to

propose and defend an *absolute principle of truthmaking*, one according to which *every* truth is made true by *something* in the world beyond itself. I maintain that an absolute principle must be true, that any weakened version is straightforwardly contradictory or incoherent. Thus, I defend what has been called truthmaking *maximalism*.¹

One might take the apt specific notion of truth to be articulable in terms of *coherence* or some sort of *pragmatism*. If so, an absolute principle of truthmaking is indubitable: in the former case, every truth is seemingly made true by some relation of coherence and those representations to which it stands in this relation; in the latter, every truth is seemingly made true by certain interests (or ends) and the capacity of that representation to contribute to or harmonize those interests. In both cases, a true representation is not so merely in itself, but is made true by relation to something beyond itself. So if one is dubious of an absolute principle, it seems this is because one thinks the apt (specific) notion of truth is to be understood in some other way.

If one thinks that the true representations are those that *correspond*, in some sense, to the world, doubts regarding the absolute principle—or the very idea of truthmaking—might arise. It is, presumably, that to which a true representation corresponds that is the thing in the world beyond itself that makes it true. Although in many cases, it might seem clear to what in the world a truth corresponds, there are also cases of obvious truths that do not seem to correspond to anything whatsoever. Since concerns regarding the absolute principle arise only given such a correspondence theory of truth, it is this specific notion that underlies my discussion. It should be noted, however, that the idea motivating the acceptance of some truthmaking principle is general and, hence, independent of any specific notion of truth.

I begin by adopting two constraints and, in light of these, articulate a principle that captures the relation between a proposition² and whatever it is beyond itself that makes it true. That *every* true proposition has a truthmaker as defined by this principle is the absolute principle of truthmaking I defend. There are strong intuitive reasons for accepting this absolute principle and the maximalism that follows, but I do not rely on these reasons alone. The crux of this paper is the arguments I propound that the absolute principle and, thus, maximalism, must be true. However, it has

1. This notion is introduced at Armstrong 2004, 5.

2. Henceforth, for the purpose of discussion, I take propositions to be the primary bearers of truth.

become familiar that for many problematic propositions there appear to be no truthmakers among mundane objects or even those more recondite entities commonly employed by metaphysicians. Most philosophers take this to show that an absolute principle of truthmaking is untenable. In this paper, I suggest the opposite response: one should take the arguments I present (and the intuitive reasons) for an absolute principle as showing that there are entities in the world that serve as truthmakers for all propositions, including the problematic ones. Such entities, which I call *simple facts*, differ from other truthmakers heretofore considered in the literature. Indeed they are unfamiliar, but I suggest that the arguments I present along with the intuitive motivations for an absolute principle should persuade one that the unfamiliarity of simple facts, their uniqueness, should be embraced rather than regarded as a basis of skepticism.

I. *The motivating idea and articulating a principle of truthmaking*

The motivating idea in this discussion, stemming from an ecumenical notion of truth, is that a true proposition is not so merely in itself.³ The challenge is to articulate a principle that captures the relation between a proposition and whatever it is beyond itself that makes it true.

A. *Two constraints on the truthmaking relation*

One constraint on this relation is that what it is beyond the proposition that makes it true must in itself be sufficient for this. In other words, *whatever this truthmaker is, it guarantees the truth of the proposition, in that its existence alone necessitates the truth of that proposition*. Were this not so, the truthmaker could exist and yet the proposition be false, thereby indicating that the supposed truthmaker is not what makes that proposition true. David Armstrong presents an argument for this constraint. (See

3. This idea is very similar to the one expressed by Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra in terms of a truth being grounded: "Thus the insight behind the idea of truth-makers is that truth is grounded. In other words, truth is not primitive. If a certain proposition is true, then it owes its truth to something else: its truth is not a primitive, brute, ultimate fact." (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, 21) Not everyone accepts these ideas. Proponents of an *identity theory of truth* hold that a true representation is identical to what makes it true; hence, a true representation is indeed so merely in itself. Such theorists, though, deny that truth is primitive. For discussion of the identity theory see Baldwin 1991, for defense of it, in one form or another, see Dodd and Hornsby 1992; Dodd 1995; Candlish 1999, 1995.

Armstrong 2004, 6f.) As an *argument*, though, it seems lacking, for it is essentially a consideration of the scenario I have just described, one in which a truthmaker exists but the proposition it is supposed to make true is false. As such, it relies wholly on the intuitive force of the claim that a truthmaker necessitates a proposition it makes true. However, since this constraint is almost universally accepted, I think little more needs to be provided in way of its defense.⁴

A second constraint on the truthmaking relation, one less widely acknowledged, emerges when one recognizes that most propositions are *discriminating*, in that they *represent* (or *are about*) only certain features of the world.⁵ To deny this would be to hold that a proposition is indiscriminate, that it represents nothing in particular or everything whatsoever.⁶ However, if what it is to believe is to adopt an attitude towards a proposition, and if one characterizes something with language by expressing a proposition, one's mundane experience indicates that it is false that propositions are indiscriminate. This is because one certainly seems able to have a belief or speak about a particular thing to the exclusion of others. When one has a belief or speaks about, say, the ceramic owl on my desk, one's attention is thereby directed to this particular thing; one enters into an intentional relationship with this ceramic owl and not some other thing, nor everything whatsoever. Were propositions not discriminating, one would be unable to enter into an intentional relationship with such fine details of the world (at least not by believing or speaking).

Thus, propositions are, in general, discriminating. If so, then only certain features of the world, those thereby represented, can be relevant to the truth of a proposition. The identity of a proposition is determined by what it represents and, as an abstract representational entity, there is little more to its nature than what it represents. Those features of the world,

4. Trenton Merricks characterizes the constraint as "truthmaker orthodoxy", see Merricks 2007, 5. For examples of those who accept it, see: Beebe and Dodd 2005b, 2; Dodd 2002, 71; Molnar 2000, 84; Read 2000, 67; Smith 1999, 276; Williamson 1999, 254; Armstrong 1997, 115; Bigelow 1988, 125; Fox 1987, 189. For two who reject it, see Parsons 1999 and Cameron 2005 (though it is accepted in Cameron 2008).

5. Examples of propositions that might not be discriminating in the above sense are *this is a wonderful world* and *the world is everything that is the case*.

6. There is a tradition, going back to Hempel 1945a, 1945b, according to which a sentence like "All ravens are black" represents or is, in some sense, about everything whatsoever, insofar as it is logically equivalent to "All things are non-ravens or black" and so is confirmed by any object. This controversial view, which gives rise to the so-called "Raven Paradox", has been the focus of much discussion. Specifically addressing the view or paradox here goes beyond present purposes.

then, that are not represented by a proposition have literally nothing to do with that proposition and, *a fortiori*, nothing to do with its truth. Since what makes a proposition, p , true is, of course, relevant to its truth, the truthmaker of p must be among those things p represents.

It is difficult to say definitively what a given proposition represents. Consider p , *the ceramic owl is on my desk*. It seems undeniable that p represents this ceramic owl and my desk. Moreover, it seems just as clear that p does *not* represent the tree outside my window, my cat at home or the world at large. Whether p represents the material nature of this ceramic owl or its size or weight is unclear, in the absence of further theoretical considerations; what makes it at least plausible that p represents these features of the world is that they pertain to what p does represent explicitly. Hence, some of what a discriminating proposition represents is explicit, some of what it does *not* represent is patent and there are other features of the world that it might represent. The foregoing considerations, therefore, suggest a second constraint on the truthmaking relation: *whatever makes a proposition true must be among those features of the world pertaining to what that proposition explicitly represents.*⁷

B. *A principle that might be supposed to capture the truthmaking relation*

As noted above, the first constraint on the truthmaker relation, that the existence of a truthmaker for a proposition necessitates its truth, is almost universally accepted. Consequently, a principle like the following is the starting point for many discussions of truthmaking:

(TM_{Nec}) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff it is necessary that if x exists, then p is true.^{8,9}

7. The preceding three paragraphs present an argument for a view to which Rodriguez-Pereyra expresses sympathy: "the truth of a truth-bearer is determined by its subject matter, or some feature of it, no matter what the nature of the subject matter may be." (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, 21. See also Ibid, 25.) This argument above also supports Barry Smith's claims at Smith 1999, 279.

8. Essentially the same principle is found at: Rami 2009, 13; Restall 1996, 89 (all page numbers referring to this paper refer to the reprint in Lowe and Rami 2009); Horwich 2009, 186; Caputo 2007, 278; Merricks 2007, 5; Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006a, 186; 2006b, 959; Schnieder 2006b, 26; Dodd 2002, 71; Fox 1987, 189. As noted above, (TM_{Nec}) is often merely the starting point for discussions of truthmaking. None of the cited authors, with the possible exception of Fox, believe that this principle, in itself, provides a definition of truthmaking.

9. An alternative formulation, one honoring the idea that the relation of strict implication holds only between propositions, is:

There are, however, obvious problems with this principle, taken as a definition of the truthmaking relation, rather than merely a criterion of adequacy. It is a consequence of (TM_{Nec}) —and any principle that relies on a bald notion of necessity or entailment to capture the truthmaking relation—that anything whatsoever is the truthmaker for a necessary truth. The ceramic owl on my desk is the truthmaker for both the proposition that $2 + 2 = 4$ and that water is H_2O , since it is necessary that if the owl exists, $2 + 2 = 4$ is true (and that water is H_2O). Yet it seems that this ceramic owl is not what makes these propositions about the sum of two numbers (or the number 4) and about water true.¹⁰

Given this problem, some simply exclude consideration of necessary truths from discussions of truthmaking. (See, for example, Beebe and Dodd 2005b, 2.) This seems unsatisfactory. Without some reason for thinking that necessary truths, unlike contingent ones, are true independently of anything else in the world, excluding them from the purview of a truthmaking principle seems an *ad hoc* measure, one that just ignores a class of interesting truths. Moreover, it is not only necessary truths that indicate problems with a principle like (TM_{Nec}) . Since it is necessary that if the brownness of my desk exists, then it is true that my desk has a surface and it is necessary that if Peter's vision exists, then it is true that Peter has eyes, then this brownness is the truthmaker for *my desk has a surface* and Peter's vision is the truthmaker for *Peter has eyes*. Yet it seems that these things are not what make true these propositions.¹¹

These problems for (TM_{Nec}) arise because the truthmakers identified by this principle do not seem to be relevant to the truth of the propositions they are supposed to make true. A relation between an object and proposition that merely necessitates the truth of that proposition does not suffice as the truthmaking relation for it neglects that a proposition is (in most cases) discriminating and, hence, only certain features of the world are relevant to its truth. The proposition that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that water is H_2O represents no feature of the ceramic owl on my desk and so this owl is not relevant to the truth of either. Similarly, the brownness of this

(TM_{Ent}) Necessarily, if the proposition, p , is true, then there exists at least one entity α such that α exists entails p is true (See Beebe and Dodd 2005b, 2)

10. This kind of problem for (TM_{Nec}) has been widely noticed, see Rami 2009, 14; Restall 1996, 89-90; Caputo 2007, 279; Williamson 1999, 254; Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006a, 186f.; Schnieder 2006a, 62.

11. This further problem for (TM_{Nec}) , regarding contingent propositions, has also been widely noticed. See Rami 2009, 14 for similar examples, as well as Caputo 2007, 279f.; Schnieder 2006b, 62ff; Smith 1999, 278.

desk does not seem to pertain to what the proposition *my desk has a surface* explicitly represents, for the proposition is compatible with the desk having any color or no color at all. Its brownness, therefore, is not relevant to the truth of the proposition. In short, the reason that (TM_{Nec}) is unacceptable as a definition of the truthmaking relation is because it fails to honor the second constraint articulated above.

C. *A different principle in terms of the relation in virtue of*

So these problems seem to show that although the connection between a truthmaker and the proposition(s) it makes true is necessary, a bald necessary connection (or mere entailment) is not sufficiently fine-grained to capture this relation.¹² Such a notion leaves out that the truthmaking relation is not only necessary but, because propositions are discriminating, it is also *discerning*. It is discerning not only in that the relation does not hold between just any two things, but also in that it does not hold between every pair of things that necessarily co-exist, such as the proposition $2 + 2 = 4$ and the ceramic owl on my desk or the brownness of this desk and the proposition *my desk has a surface*. The relation is also clearly *asymmetric*; a proposition is made true by something in the world, but that thing is not made true or made to be as it is by the proposition.

These features—being necessary, yet discerning, and asymmetric—indicate that the truthmaking relation is largely determined by the nature of the truthmaker: given that particular thing, it must be the case that the particular proposition(s) it makes true is (or are) true. Thus, it is *in virtue of* its truthmaker that a proposition is true.

Others have recognized the importance of the relation *in virtue of* to truthmaking. Thus, David Armstrong writes: “The idea of a truthmaker for a particular truth, then, is just some existent, some portion of reality, *in virtue of* which that truth is true.” (Armstrong 2004, 5. *Emphasis added.*) Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra defends the principle:

(TM_{IVO}) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff x is something in virtue of which p is true.¹³

12. Adolf Rami recognizes that the “familiar modal notions” of necessity and strict implication are too weak to account in themselves for the truthmaking relation. See Rami 2009, 20.

13. This principle is adapted from the one presented at Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, 18. See, as well, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006, 187 and Cameron 2005, 43.

However, for two related reasons, such a principle cannot serve to define the truthmaking relation. First of all, it follows from this principle that the world itself—assuming it is a thing—is a truthmaker for any proposition whatsoever. It does seem that the world itself is something in virtue of which, say, *there is a ceramic owl on my desk* is true, as well as *my desk has a surface* and $2 + 2 = 4$. This is a consequence embraced by some.¹⁴ (Although it follows from the principle Rodriguez-Pereyra defends, he seems to have no truck with the position.¹⁵) Armstrong maintains that not only is a proposition made true by “some portion of reality” but also that the world itself—“the totality of being”—makes every true proposition true.¹⁶ But this is, I believe, incorrect. If a proposition is discriminating—and I argued above most are—then what makes that proposition true is limited to those particular features of the world pertaining to what that proposition explicitly represents. Hence, the world itself cannot be a truthmaker for any proposition that does not represent the entire world (if there can be such a proposition).

The second reason (TM_{IVO}) is problematic is closely related. Although it is in virtue of its truthmaker that a proposition is true, the truthmaking relation does not hold *merely* in virtue of that truthmaker. It would not hold between that truthmaker and some proposition, p , if p did not represent what it in fact does. Thus, (TM_{IVO}) leaves out the crucial role that any proposition plays in determining whether the truthmaker relation holds. Insofar as a truthmaking principle is supposed to be definitive and so provide some explanation of why the relation holds when it does, the crucial contribution of the proposition should be explicit in the principle.

Therefore, I suggest that the appropriate principle of truthmaking is:

14. See, for example, Schaffer 2010. In Cameron 2008, Cameron accepts that “the world” makes true all “negative” truths, but not the “positive” ones. Thus, one reason for accepting the claim is that it provides the basis of a strategy for dealing with truths for which there is no obvious truthmaker, such as negative existentials, i.e. true propositions about what does *not* exist.

15. “This amounts to saying that ... truth ... is determined by how the *world* is. But this is not satisfactory, for it does not account for the idea that truth is determined by subject matter since according to it all truths, whatever their subject matter, are determined by how the world is. (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, 25. Italics in original.) See, as well, Note 7 above.

16. “For every truth, the least discerning of all truthmakers is the world itself, the totality of being ... It is also the most promiscuous truthmaker, for it makes every truth, or every truth that has a truthmaker, true.” (Armstrong 2004, 18f.) Armstrong does not provide any argument for this claim.

(TM_A) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff x is one of the things, as determined by what p represents, in virtue of which p is true.

According to (TM_A), $2 + 2 = 4$ is not made true by the ceramic owl on my desk, nor is *my desk has a surface* made true by its brownness. Although it is perhaps true that my desk has a surface in virtue of the totality of being, this proposition is not *made true* by the world itself, but rather by something pertaining in particular to what this proposition represents, e.g., my desk or its surface. Thus, (TM_A) avoids the kinds of problems that beset a principle of truthmaking articulated in terms of a bald necessary connection or an unqualified relation of *in virtue of*.

For these reasons—and those to be presented below—I believe the relation *in virtue of* is foundational to the very idea of truthmaking. Nevertheless, some have found reason to object to use of the relation in this context. One objection is that the notion *in virtue of* is unanalyzed.¹⁷ Rodriguez-Pereyra is satisfied to regard the notion as primitive (but notes that just because it is primitive does not mean it cannot be clarified¹⁸). I do not think it is primitive, in the sense that the notion cannot be explicated in any other terms. Something occurs or a feature of the world exists *in virtue of* x if (and only if) that occurrence (or that feature) arises through the very nature of x . Consequently, the mere existence of x insures the presence of that occurrence (or feature). This might or might not be a proper analysis of *in virtue of* (the conditions of such are not clear), yet it does seem to provide a sufficient explication of the notion.

The notion does seem serviceable. Indeed, because it is particularly amenable to the two constraints on the truthmaking relation presented above, the relation *in virtue of* appears to have a role in the theory of truthmaking that is essential and ineluctable. This is clear when one recognizes that any principle of truthmaking seems incorrect insofar as it follows from that principle that a proposition is *made true* by some entity *that it is not true in virtue of*.

17. See Lowe 2009, 201. Rami presents three criticisms of a principle of truthmaking in terms of the *in virtue of* relation. See Rami 2009, 23. These criticisms, which are presented in a single paragraph, are quite compressed and seem tractable; for these reasons, I forgo discussion of them here.

18. “*In virtue of* is a primitive notion, not reducible to notions like entailment. Yet that it is primitive does not mean that it is unclear. One can clarify what it means by specifying which propositions are true in virtue of which entities.” (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, 18)

Consider the principle proposed by Barry Smith:

(TM_S) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff it is necessary that (x exists iff p is true). (Smith 1999, 279)

This is a strengthened version of (TM_{Nec}) above and is supposed to be an improvement on that principle because it is not a consequence of (TM_S) that every necessary proposition is made true by any object whatsoever (because it might be the case that, for example, *water is H₂O* is true though the ceramic owl on my desk fails to exist). However, given (TM_S), it follows that *water is H₂O* is made true by the number 13, for it is necessary that the number 13 exists if and only if *water is H₂O* is true. This result is unacceptable because it is obvious that the truth of *water is H₂O* has nothing to do with the number 13 and so is not true in virtue of the number. So (TM_S) is problematic because it identifies as a truthmaker for a proposition some entity that that proposition is not true in virtue of.

A related problem confronts the principle of truthmaking that E. J. Lowe proposes. Lowe's principle employs the notion of essence:¹⁹

(TM_L) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff it is part of the essence of p that if x exists, then p is true. (Lowe 2009, 209)

The essence of a given proposition, p , is presumably what it is that makes p the very thing it is. What is represented by a given proposition seems essential to it (as does being abstract); the truth-value of a necessary proposition seems essential to it. In light of this, it follows from (TM_L) that a thing is a truthmaker for proposition, p , just in case in order for p to be the very proposition it is, it must be that if that thing exists, then p is true. Consider, then, the propositions that my desk has a surface and that $2 + 2 = 4$. It is not farfetched, given what the proposition represents, that in order for *my desk has a surface* to be the very proposition it is, it must be the case that if the brownness of this desk exists, then *my desk has a surface* is true. Given its essential truth, it is not implausible that in order for $2 + 2 = 4$ to be the very proposition it is, it must be the case that if the ceramic owl on my desk exists, then $2 + 2 = 4$ is true. Thus, it

19. For the relevant notion see Fine 1994 and Lowe 1998 (especially Chapter 6) and Lowe 2006 (especially Chapter 3).

seems to follow from (TM₁) that this brownness is a truthmaker for *my desk has a surface* and the ceramic owl on my desk makes true $2 + 2 = 4$. Yet undoubtedly it is just such results that one who employs the primitive notion of essence in this context intends to avoid.²⁰ This notion is supposed to provide the means of articulating a necessary yet discerning relation between a proposition and what in the world makes it true. It is unclear, however, that the unrefined notion does this.²¹

The most compelling way of rejecting the forementioned results and thereby refining the notion of the essence of a proposition is by denying that this brownness is essential to the truth of *my desk has a surface* because this proposition is not true *in virtue of* the brownness and by denying that this ceramic owl is essential to the truth of $2 + 2 = 4$ because this proposition is not true *in virtue of* the ceramic owl. And so the notion of the essence of a proposition is too unwieldy—and seems cannot be adequately calibrated—without relying on the relation *in virtue of*. This suggests that this relation is actually the more fundamental notion when considering truthmaking. This is borne out by Lowe's reliance on the relation at key points in the presentation of his own account.²²

In the same vein, in light of the problems confronting a principle of truthmaking, like (TM_{Nec}), employing a bald notion of necessity or entailment, some have proposed a principle in terms of a more stringent notion of relevant entailment:

(TM_{Rel}) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff the proposition that x exists relevantly entails the proposition that p is true. (Restall 1996, 95f.)

This notion of relevant entailment is a technical one that can be fully characterized only within some formal system in which the notion of entailment is restricted. An evaluation of the aptness of any principle of truthmaking formulated by means of such a system must be guided by

20. See the first paragraph of Lowe 2009.

21. Another problem with (TM₁) is that it leaves out the crucial role that any *truthmaker* plays in determining whether the truthmaker relation holds in just the way that (TM_{VO}) leaves out the role of the proposition.

22. “[W]hen we say that a true proposition needs to be ‘made’ true, we mean that it has to be true ‘in virtue of’ something ...” (Lowe 2009, 202). Moreover, Lowe's use of the relation *in virtue of* is crucial in developing the notion of essential dependence, which is supposed to underlie his account of truthmaking. See Lowe 2009, 206f. Also: “And by the ‘essence’ of any entity I just mean that in virtue of which it is the very entity that it is.” (Lowe 2009, 212)

one's prior understanding of the notion of in virtue of. If some principle like (TM_{rel}) had as a consequence that some proposition is made true by something that that proposition is clearly not true in virtue of, then this would be conclusive evidence that the principle is false—for example, if it had as a consequence that my sandal were a truthmaker of the proposition that there is a ceramic owl on my desk.²³

Therefore, the relation *in virtue of* does seem to be essential to and ineluctable in the theory of truthmaking and, hence, should be explicit in a principle that purports to capture the truthmaking relation. (TM_A) not only employs this relation, but includes a qualification that makes it conform to the two constraints presented above. Given these features, it avoids the problems that confront each of the other principles of truthmaking canvassed. Indeed, given these features, it seems that any principle is unacceptable to the extent that it is incompatible with (TM_A) . This is, I believe, compelling evidence that (TM_A) is the correct principle of truthmaking.

II. *The absoluteness of the proposed principle*

The principle that I propose honors the motivating idea of truthmaking—that a true proposition is not so merely in itself—and best captures the relation between a proposition and whatever it is beyond itself that makes it true is:

(TM_A) For every object x and proposition p : x is a truthmaker for p iff x is one of the particular things, as determined by what p represents, in virtue of which p is true

Having articulated this principle, and presented some reason for thinking it correct, I now present and defend an absolute principle of truthmaking, to wit, *every true proposition has a truthmaker in the sense specified by (TM_A) .*

23. Rodriguez-Pereyra has argued (in 2006b) that any known notion of relevant entailment has as a consequence that the truthmaker of a conjunctive proposition is a truthmaker for either conjunct. Thus, on (TM_{rel}) , what makes true *the ceramic owl is on my desk and there is a tree outside my window* is a truthmaker for *the ceramic owl is on my desk*. Insofar as the latter proposition is discriminating and so does not represent the tree outside my window, then it has nothing to do with that tree and so is not made true in virtue of what makes true the conjunctive proposition, which explicitly represents the tree. Therefore, if Rodriguez-Pereyra is correct, no version of (TM_{rel}) explicated in terms of any known notion of relevant entailment is correct.

Thus, I accept what is called truthmaking *maximalism*. (See Armstrong 2004, 5 and Rami 2009, 3. The view sometimes goes without the name; see Merricks 2007, 1.)

Maximalism is a contentious position. A few explicitly support it²⁴ or express sympathy for it;²⁵ most reject it.²⁶ Both camps, however, seem to agree that there is *no direct argument for the position*.²⁷ Armstrong writes, in regards to maximalism: “I do not have any direct argument. My hope is that philosophers of realist inclination will be immediately attracted to the idea that a truth, any truth, should depend for its truth [on] something ‘outside’ it, in virtue of which it is true,”²⁸ and the position “seems fairly obvious once attention is drawn to it, but I do not know how to argue for it further.” (Armstrong 1989, 89) Trenton Merricks writes: “No one gives much of an argument for [the principle that for every true claim there is something or other that—just by existing—makes that claim true]. Instead [its] main support comes from something like the brute intuition that what is true depends in a non-trivial way on what there is or the world or things or being.” (Merricks 2007, 2) Julian Dodd goes further; he maintains that an absolute principle of truthmaking cannot be defended: “It is noticeable that those who rely heavily on the [principle that whenever something is true, there must be some thing whose existence guarantees its truth] are quite unable to justify it. I believe there to be a reason for this: it cannot be justified.” (Dodd 2002, 70) I do not think the supporter of maximalism need rely on its intuitive plausibility. Indeed, *pace*

24. For example, Armstrong (see Armstrong 2004, 5); the early-20th century German phenomenologist, Alexander Pfänder (for an account of Pfänder’s views, see Mulligan 2009); and Kevin Mulligan (see Mulligan 2007, 51). See, as well, Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006c (though see Note 27 below) and Cameron 2008.

25. For example, Lowe: “The idea that *all* truths need to be *made* true is an appealing one.” (Lowe 2009, 201. First emphasis added.) See Lowe 2009, 208, as well.

26. For citations, see below.

27. In Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006c, the author defends maximalism against a particular argument against the position (*viz.*, the one contained in Milne 2005). Such a defense is not a direct argument for maximalism. Rodriguez-Pereyra concedes that he has not provided such an argument. He argues for something that “comes close” to maximalism (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006a, 191), though his position is “not exactly the same as” maximalism, for he believes only a “significant class” of true propositions—and not all—have truthmakers (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2006c, Note 1 and Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, 31). The considerations Cameron adduces for maximalism are two rhetorical questions and the assertion that “negative” truths must be treated in the same way as “positive” ones (see Cameron 2008, 412); this falls short of a direct argument.

28. Armstrong 2004, 7. The text actually reads: “should depend for its truth for something ‘outside’ it”, but this seems to be an error.

Merricks and Dodd, there seems to be a direct and powerful argument in its favor.

Suppose one rejects the proposed absolute principle of truthmaking, holding that there is some proposition that is true yet lacks a truthmaker. It follows that for some proposition, p , p is true and yet there is nothing particular (as determined by what p represents) in virtue of which it is so. So there is no feature of the world—nor several features taken collectively—that is sufficient, in an explanatory way, for the truth of p . Despite there being nothing that suffices for the truth of p , there might be some feature of the world necessary for its truth. Note, however, that it is not obvious that there is, for any plausible and interesting²⁹ candidate for such a feature, such as some condition that embodies how p represents the world as being or some entity that guarantees that the world is as p represents it as being, would necessitate (in an illuminating way) the truth of p . By hypothesis, there are no such features. Any necessary feature would have to be both insufficient for the truth of p and yet clearly related to p .

So although it is possible that there is some feature of the world necessary for the truth of p , its lack of truthmaker notwithstanding, it is just as possible that there is not. (Indeed, in light of the foregoing point, that there is *no* interesting necessary feature seems more plausible.) In which case p is true independently of any and every particular way the world is. There is no feature of the world relevant to its truth in the sense that there is no feature that suffices for its truth, nor any clearly related feature that must be so if p is true. Consequently, any or every feature of the world might be different and this would not affect the truth of p .

If p is true and yet has no truthmaker, there is no reason to think that its contradictory, $\text{not-}p$, also lacks one. (On the contrary, the case in which both p and $\text{not-}p$ lack truthmakers *though* p is true is so perplexing as to be hardly intelligible.³⁰) But given that p has no truthmaker and so any or

29. There would, of course, be many *uninteresting* necessary conditions for the truth of p , such as $2 + 2$ being equal to 4 and the truth of any necessary proposition. But I set these aside as not being pertinent to the present point.

30. In most cases, if p is taken to be true yet lack a truthmaker, the truthmaker for $\text{not-}p$ is supposed to be obvious. Consider, for example, the propositions (i) that this ceramic owl is not purple; (ii) that there is no tiger in my office; (iii) that all crows are black, which some might regard as true though lacking truthmakers. In each case, the contradictory of the proposition, were it true, would seem to have an obvious truthmaker (to wit, a purple ceramic owl, a tiger in my office, a crow that is not black). But the case in which *both* p and $\text{not-}p$ lack truthmakers is quite different. In this case, for neither p nor $\text{not-}p$ is there any feature of the world sufficient for the truth of either proposition; moreover, for neither proposition would there appear to be any

every feature of the world could be different without affecting the truth of p , it is possible that the world be such as to contain grounds sufficient for the truth of not- p , thereby making not- p true, while leaving p true. Therefore, it is possible that both p and not- p be true. This, however, is a contradiction and certainly not possible. Rejecting the absolute principle leads to contradiction, and so one cannot coherently maintain that there is some proposition that is true yet not so in virtue of something particular in the world.

This incoherence can be drawn out in another way, or perhaps attributed to this: 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 should be accepted.

Coda: truthmaking v. truth supervening on being

At this point, it is imperative to consider an important alternative strategy that attempts to do justice to the motivating idea of truthmaking, to wit, that a true proposition is not so in itself. In light of there being no obvious entity that makes true propositions expressed by negative existential sentences, such as *there are no unicorns* or *there is not a tiger in my office*, some have rejected the idea of propositions *being made true by something or other*, in favor of the idea that *truth depends, more generally, on what*

clearly related feature of the world necessary for its truth. So whether the world is as p represents it—or as not- p does—seems entirely independent of how things are; whether it is the one way or the other seems to have nothing to do with the world.

exists. A principle founded on the latter, this idea that “truth supervenes on being”, allows that some propositions are true because of what exists, while others are true because of what fails to exist. Thus, John Bigelow has proposed the following principle to honor the idea that a truth is not true in itself:

- (TS) For every proposition p : if p is true, then either at least one entity y exists that would not exist if p were not true or at least one entity y does not exist that would exist if p were not true.³¹

Such a principle has been influential through the work of David Lewis, who adopted it. (See, for example, Lewis 2001, 610.)

Suppose, therefore, one thinks that a negative existential proposition like *there are no unicorns* is true and lacks a truthmaker; nevertheless, the truth of this proposition, p , supervenes on being, in the sense of (TS). Given this supervenience, it is false, as I contend in the key argument above for the absolute principle of truthmaking, that the truth of a proposition without a truthmaker is independent of the way the world is. Consequently, one need not accept that any or every feature of the world might be different leaving the truth of p unaffected—if a unicorn existed, p would be false—and rejecting this claim seems to block the contradiction that I believe indicates the incoherence of rejecting the proposed absolute principle.

I think (TS) is compelling, indeed I think it is certainly true, and yet I do not think that it alone can do justice to the idea that a true proposition is not so in itself. So I think the above line of argument fails to counter the argument that the denial of the absolute principle of truthmaking leads to contradiction. Propounding (TS) while maintaining that a true proposition lacks a truthmaker in the sense of (TM_A) leads to contradiction, it merely arises in a different way. (TS) captures the idea that there can be no change in the truth-value of p without some change in what exists. The above line embraces this idea and makes a further supposition, namely, that the truth of a proposition, although supervening on being and, hence, not independent of the way the world is, insofar as it lacks a truthmaker, independent of *any particular feature* of the world. Thus, it supposes that were a unicorn to exist, the world would be different—the truth-value of p would be different—and yet no particular feature of the

31. See Bigelow 1988, 133, 135. This formulation comes from Rami 2009, 28.

world would have changed. But this seems to me impossible. If a thing as a whole changes, then it seems some particular feature or part of it must change.³² It follows that if some phenomenon supervenes on something, it must supervene on some part or particular feature of that thing. In this case, if the truth of a proposition supervenes on the world, it must supervene on some part or particular feature of the world.

Whatever this particular feature is is the truthmaker of that proposition. In the case of the proposition that there are no unicorns it is, admittedly, not at all obvious on what part or particular feature of the world the truth of this proposition supervenes. Were there *lacks* or *absences*, then it is clear that its truth would supervene on such; the proposition would be false were some particular lack (or absence), to wit, the lack of unicorns, to cease to exist. Such negative entities, however, are dubious and *ad hoc*, so some alternative account of the truthmakers for negative existentials is needed (and one is presented in §IV below). Here, though, the crucial point is that to deny that such a proposition has a truthmaker although it supervenes on being leads one to the incoherent claim that a thing as a whole might change though no part or particular feature of it does.

Therefore, the idea that truth supervenes on being does not avoid the incoherence that follows from denying that every truth has a truthmaker, the incoherence just appears differently. Not surprisingly, then, the problem for the coherence of the very idea of representation that arises when one denies the absolute principle of truthmaking arises in this context, too. To see this, suppose that the proposition that there are no tigers in my office lacks a truthmaker and merely supervenes on being. Insofar as this proposition has no truthmaker, there is no feature of the world in virtue of which it is true and, thus, nothing on which to hang the conditions that must be met in order for the proposition to be true. (Were there such conditions, they would indicate the truthmaker of the proposition, yet, *ex hypothesi*, it has none.) Without such truth-conditions, however, the proposition has no more claim to represent tigers and my office than trees and the ground outside my window or something entirely different. Thus, there appears to be no connection between the proposition *qua* representation and the world. There is nothing the representation represents. It is just such a “representation” that I contend is incoherent. To insist that despite there being nothing in the world that makes the proposition

32. This claim is especially compelling if one assumes that the change is intrinsic or non-relational, and it seems that all changes to the world itself must be of this sort.

true, it still has truth-conditions—and so can represent specifically there being no tigers in my office—would be to insist on an utterly mysterious connection between the proposition and the world, for the conditions required for it to be true are met, yet *by nothing, by no particular feature of the world*.

One might have the concern that I beg the question here against the philosopher who rejects the idea that propositions are made true by something or other in favor of the idea that truth supervenes on being, for such a philosopher would respond to the foregoing simply by maintaining that a proposition can represent and thereby have truth-conditions—and be made true—though there is nothing, no thing, i.e. no particular feature of the world, that the proposition represents. After all, the crux of this alternative strategy is the idea that a proposition can be made true though there is no thing that makes it so.

I believe this sort of response is misguided. My argument above that an account of truthmaking in terms of (TS) is just as problematic as one based on a principle like (TM_A) when one denies that every truth is made true by some particular feature of the world is based on some very general and, I believe, plausible ontological principles, namely: that insofar as representation and truthmaking are *relations* they stand between entities; an entity is something; and in order for any entity to stand in any relation—or bear any property whatsoever—that entity must exist. Each of these principles has much plausibility and is independent of (TS).³³ Therefore, each may legitimately be assumed in this context and so a charge of begging the question, because one accepts these principles, is not apt.

Indeed, that the rejection of a principle like (TM_A) in favor of (TS) requires one to deny the conjunction of these general principles seems to provide strong reason for thinking that (TS) by itself is inadequate as a principle of truthmaking or as the basis of an alternative strategy of doing justice to the idea that a true proposition is not so in itself. Nevertheless, whatever is plausible or compelling about the idea that truth supervenes on being follows from an absolute principle of truthmaking, for it must be the case that for any proposition, *p*, if *p* is true, then at least one entity would not exist if *p* were not true—namely, the truthmaker of *p*.

33 A defense of these principles is beyond the scope of the present paper. The last is what Plantinga labels *serious actualism* (in Plantinga 1983); for a recent defense of it, see van Inwagen 2009.

III. *Objection to an Absolute Principle*

Despite the initial plausibility of the claim that *every* true proposition must be made true by something in the world (distinct from itself)—despite the arguments just given for an absolute principle of truthmaking—many will resist the claim (regardless of whether the truthmaking relation is aptly captured by (TM_A)). Such resistance is understandable. There are many obviously true propositions for which there is nothing obvious in virtue of which they are true. In light of such propositions, many find it compelling that truthmaking gives out in certain cases and, thus, that the correct principle of truthmaking must be restricted.

A. *Analyticity and truthmaking*

Analytic truths are supposed to be “true in virtue of meaning” and, as such, true regardless of how the world is. No entity, then, is supposed to be needed to make a claim like ‘All bachelors are married’ true—nothing is.³⁴ Despite the familiarity of this gloss on analyticity, it is puzzling how, by merely meaning what it does, a sentence could express a proposition belief in which is an appropriate goal of inquiry; there is, after all, no intrinsic connection between being meaningful and being true. It seems, then, that there could be nothing about a proposition or, more generally, a representation, *per se*, that makes belief in it an appropriate goal of inquiry. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of analyticity, but it seems to me the significance of this semantic phenomenon is epistemological rather than metaphysical. An analytic sentence is one that can be recognized and known to express a true proposition *a priori*, in light of one’s understanding of the rules of language—though exactly which proposition it expresses might require some empirical investigation. What makes this proposition true, however, is something beyond itself (it corresponds with the world or coheres with other objects of belief or what have you).³⁵

This is, of course, no argument that propositions expressed by analytic sentences must have truthmakers, that argument came above, in arguing

34. Rodriguez-Pereyra writes: “In general, analytic propositions are not grounded in reality.” (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005, Note 7) Amie Thomasson explicitly supports the “venerable view that analytic claims do not require truth-makers”. (See Thomasson 2007, 67–70)

35. For a similar view of analyticity see Salmon 1993. I should note that Salmon thinks it ‘obvious’ that analytic sentences are true, in part, in virtue of extra-linguistic facts. See *Ibid*, Note 16.

that *every* true proposition has a truthmaker in the sense characterized by (TM_A). My point here is merely that there is nothing in the very idea of analyticity that excludes truthmaking. Given the arguments of the preceding section (§II), it seems that an account of analyticity should be informed by a consideration of truthmaking—for, on pain of incoherence, there has to be something that makes an analytic truth true—rather than as basis for objecting to the idea that (all) true propositions are made true by something in the world.

B. *Seemingly intractable truths: problems for the standard views of truthmaking*

Setting aside concerns about analytic truths, there are many other true propositions that appear to be more straightforwardly problematic for the view that every proposition is true in virtue of something in the world. To appreciate these examples, first consider a true proposition that seems to have an obvious truthmaker and seems to provide the basis for a simple account of truthmaking, namely, that this ceramic owl exists. Many take it for granted that what makes this proposition true is the ceramic owl itself.³⁶

This simple account, however, must be complicated when one considers a true proposition like that this ceramic owl is multicolored. The ceramic owl itself does not make this proposition true; for, assuming a truthmaker necessitates, merely by existing, the truth of any proposition it makes true, the owl might exist yet be a single color. In light of this constraint, some other entity makes true a proposition, such as this, that represents an inessential feature of an object.

Two kinds of things have been posited as truthmakers of such propositions: (a) *states of affairs* and (b) particularized properties, called alternatively *tropes* or *modes*.³⁷ In the first case, what makes it true that this ceramic owl is multi-colored is a complex abstract entity composed of this ceramic owl itself and the property of being multi-colored, united in a

36. See, for example, Merricks 2007, 17 (“Fido is a truthmaker for *that Fido exists*.” Merricks regards this truthmaker as “humdrum and uncontroversial”) and Armstrong 2004, 6 (“The simplest of all truth-making relations is that which hold between any truth-maker, T ... and the proposition <T exists>.”) See also Beebe and Dodd 2005b, 9.

37. A prominent proponent of states of affairs as truthmakers is Armstrong (see Armstrong 2004). Prominent proponents of tropes as truthmakers are Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons and Barry Smith (see, for example, Mulligan, Simons, Smith 1984). E. J. Lowe prefers the term ‘mode’ and defends a view of modes as truthmakers in, among other places, Lowe 2009.

suitable way. In the second case, it is this ceramic owl's particular multi-coloredness that makes the proposition true.

A grave consequence of a theory of truthmaking along these lines, on which what makes propositions true are familiar objects or abstract entities whose existence depends essentially on them, is that it is confronted by problems by a variety of propositions.

Consider (i) a proposition that provides a negative characterization of an object, for example, that this ceramic owl is not purple. It is true. Yet the proposition is not made true by the owl itself, for it could exist and be purple (its very existence does not necessitate that *this ceramic owl is not purple* is true). It seems farfetched that there is a negative property—*not being purple*—that, with the owl, composes a state of affairs whose existence guarantees the truth of this proposition, for it is plausible that the world includes only features that positively contribute to how it is. Among these are the multitude of individuals that exist and the myriad ways they are (rather than ways they are *not*). Although it is certainly possible for one to conceptualize and articulate these features as they are *not*, it seems misguided to hypostasize negative properties—and *a fortiori* negative modes—that correspond to these conceptualizations. Thus, just as it seem misguided to accept that there is a negative person at the door when no one is there, it seems similarly misguided to accept that there are literally countless negative properties that characterize this ceramic owl when it is as it is and, in particular, is not purple.

Even if there were some way to develop an ontology of negative properties or modes, other problems remain. Consider again (ii) a proposition that provides an account of what does *not* exist, for example, that there is no tiger in my office. This proposition is true. Nonetheless, there is no familiar object that makes it true; nor is it made true by any abstract entity whose existence depends essentially on some such familiar object.

Similarly, consider (iii) a proposition that characterizes what is generally or universally so, for example, that all crows are black. There is no single crow that makes this true—any particular crow might exist and the proposition *all crows are black* be false (because some other crow is not black). Even the collection of all crows that now exist does not make it true, for that collection might exist and the proposition be false, if there were some other crow that were not black. Nor is it made true by any abstract entity—no state of affairs, no mode (i.e., trope)—whose existence depends essentially on some particular familiar object.

Consider, finally, (iv) propositions that provide a true account of the past, for example, that Socrates was a philosopher, that dinosaurs roamed the earth, that I ate toast for breakfast this morning. Socrates does not exist, nor do dinosaurs, nor the toast I ate. Therefore, there are no familiar objects that make these propositions true and, consequently, they cannot be made true by any abstract entities whose existence depends essentially on such objects either.

In light of true propositions such as these—seemingly intractable truths—that are not true in virtue of any familiar object or an abstract entity, such as a state of affairs or mode, whose existence depends on such, many conclude that it is *not* the case that every single truth has a truthmaker. Indeed, some find this so obvious that they take it to be a problem for a theory of truthmaking if it does require or yield truthmakers for propositions such as these. Rami writes, characterizing what he dubs the “problem of unnecessary truth-makers”: “Intuitively these propositions [to wit, that grass is not black and that there are no unicorns] do not have truth-making entities if they are true. So it is a counterintuitive consequence if the truth-maker theorist is forced to find such truth-making entities.” (Rami 2009, 15)

I believe that this line of thinking is incorrect. If the arguments of §II are correct, insofar as the propositions that aptly represent (i) negative characterizations, (ii) what does not exist, (iii) what is generally or universally true or (iv) what was the case are representations, there must be some particular feature of the world relevant to their truth—they must be made true by something outside themselves. In other words, such propositions must be true in virtue of something particular in the world. Hence, the “problem” of unnecessary truth-makers is antithetical to the very idea of truthmaking.

David Lewis asks rhetorically: “How about negative existential truths? It seems, offhand, that they are true not because things of some kind do exist, but rather because counter-examples don’t exist....Why defy this first impression?” (Lewis 1992, 216. *Emphasis in original.*) Following him, Jonathan Tallant asks: “How about past tensed existential truths? It seems, offhand, that they are not true because things of some kind exist, but rather because ontological ground has existed ... Why defy this first impression?” (Tallant 2009, 424. *Emphasis in original.*) The reason that these first impressions should be defied is that respecting them seems to lead to contradiction and incoherence. Thus, I am advocating what Chris Daly calls facetiously the “Canadian mountie’ theory of truthmakers: a

truth always gets its truthmaker, whatever it takes.” (Daly 2005, 102) Daly objects to this maximalist position when unaccompanied by justification for an absolute principle of truthmaking: “unless justification can be found for the postulation of truthmakers for every truth whatever it takes, such postulation is *ad hoc*.” (Daly 2005, 103) I have, however, with the arguments of the preceding section attempted to provide such justification.

IV. *Defense of the Absolute Principle: simple facts*

Given the seemingly intractable truths, one might respond in three ways: (i) reject an absolute principle of truthmaking; (ii) deny that these problematic truths are indeed true propositions; (iii) identify something particular in the world in virtue of which each is true. As I have argued, the first response is incoherent; the second is literally incredible (I cannot believe that the proposition that there is no tiger in my office is not true). So there is but one feasible response: identify particular truthmakers for the seemingly intractable truths considered above, and any others that seem to challenge an absolute principle of truthmaking.

A. *A presumption of truthmaking: familiar objects or ontologically dependent abstract entities make true*

Considering the variety of seemingly intractable truths, one can discern a common source of the problem each presents. The predominant accounts of truthmaking presume that what makes true a proposition is either a familiar object or some abstract entity whose existence depends essentially on that object, for example, a state of affairs or a mode (i.e., trope). This presumption is what makes the problematic truths seem intractable for in each case there is no abstract entity, with a familiar object as its basis, to serve as a truthmaker.

The problem is most obvious, of course, in the case of a true proposition about what does not exist or about what *was* the case (concerning objects that have ceased to exist). In the case of a true negative or general characterization, although there is indeed some familiar object available, this object in itself does not make such propositions true and there seems to be no abstract entity whose existence depends essentially on that object that makes them true either: there appear to be no negative properties to constitute a negative state of affairs or that are the negative

modes of the object and no abstract entity constituted by a single familiar object makes a general characterization true (nor do the modes of a particular object).

Thus, it is the presumption that *what it is that makes a proposition true is some familiar object or an abstract entity whose existence depends on such* that makes these truths seem problematic and even intractable. Although this presumption is, admittedly, initially plausible, I think it is, in the end, antithetical to the very idea of truthmaking and so must be rejected.³⁸ I do not believe, therefore, that it is familiar objects or any abstract entities that depend ontologically on familiar objects, such as states of affairs or modes, that are the truthmakers for propositions. Consequently, their absence in the case of true negative existentials and characterizations, true general characterizations and true claims about the past presents no problems.

B. *Simple facts*

Of course, given the argument above, if the seemingly intractable propositions are true, there is something particular in the world that makes them so. Since it is not familiar objects or anything that depends for its existence on such objects, it must be a different kind of entity than is usually supposed in discussions of truthmaking. I suggest that what it is that makes a proposition true is a *simple fact*: a non-representational, ontologically basic entity that has no constituents. (Given that simple facts are not representations, the notion of truth does not apply to them; simple facts need no “factmakers” to make them factual and so none of the problems for truthmaking *per se* arise here.) Thus, it is true that there is no tiger in my office in virtue of the simple fact that there is no tiger in my office. It is true that the ceramic owl on my desk is not brown in virtue of the simple fact that it is not brown. Such simple facts are the grounds for straightforward, mundane truths but also for the difficult truths considered above.

38. Perhaps some account of what makes true the seemingly intractable truths, different from the one I propose below, can avoid this presumption. But any that maintains that the world itself is a truthmaker (for example, Schaffer 2010 and Cameron 2008) is inconsistent with the constraint on the truthmaking relation imposed by many true propositions being discriminating in the sense characterized in §I. David Armstrong's account, which relies on *totality states of affairs*—a totality state of affairs is a higher-order state of affairs that, with respect to a certain collection of (first-order) states of affairs, these are all the states of affairs there are (See Armstrong 2004, Chapters 5, 6.)—includes the presumption. For this reason, though, it is problematic in light of the idea that truth is stable, which I discuss below.

This is not the place for a full defense of simple facts. I provide this elsewhere. (See Fiocco 2014) Here, I merely try to forestall some confusion to which the claim that there are simple facts might give rise and to provide additional reason for why I believe simple facts are needed.

The term ‘fact’ is (and has been) used in many different ways; I use it for lack of a better one. Armstrong calls “facts” the states of affairs that he believes make true propositions and those who discuss his work do as well. (See Armstrong 2004, 18 and, e.g., David 2005, 142; Lowe 2009, 210) The simple facts that I am positing are not these states of affairs, which are complex entities whose existence depends on familiar objects. Nor are they the “simplest facts” of Russell, Wittgenstein’s “atomic facts” or the facts of Plantinga or Chisholm.³⁹

Simple facts are entities that exist in the world. Hence, when I claim that it is a simple fact in virtue of which, say, the proposition that there are no dodos is true, it follows that this truth is not brute. In other words, to say that a proposition is made true by a simple fact is *not* to say that it is *just true*—without any account of why. Its truth has a basis and so is explicable. Note, this explanation for why *there are no dodos* is true is not a complete explanation for why there are no dodos (a complete explanation would include an account of the severe disruptions to the bird’s native Mauritian habitat by Dutch settlement of the island). The explanation for the truth of a proposition and why what that proposition represents is as it is can be quite different. One should not expect an account of truthmaking to be a complete account of why things are as they are or of everything whatsoever. This is not to say, however, that a simple fact can only explain why a given proposition is true. The simple fact that makes it true that there is no tiger in my office right now also provides some explanation for why I can work without fear of being mauled.

Despite its name, the simple fact that there is no tiger in my office is not negative *per se*. In general, simple facts are neither negative, nor general, nor past in themselves. The features of the sentence or proposition made true by a simple fact do not characterize the nature of that fact. Hence, there should be no concern, for example, that the simple fact that makes a negative existential or negative characterization true is some sort of

39. Cf. Russell 1985, 59 (“The simplest imaginable facts are those which consist in the possession of a quality by some particular thing.”); Wittgenstein 1921 (“2.01 An atomic fact is a combination of objects (entities, things).”); Plantinga 1974 and Chisholm 1976 (Plantinga and Chisholm call complex states of affairs that *obtain* “facts”).

absence, void or lack. This simple fact is as “positive” (whatever this might mean) as any other entity that really exists.

Simple facts—precisely because of their simplicity—are intriguing and perplexing entities, so much more needs to be said about them. However, I must defer this (again, see Fiocco 2014), for the primary purpose of this paper is to articulate and defend an absolute principle of truthmaking. I will, though, present an argument to supplement the preceding master argument (in terms of the absolute principle based on (TM_A) and the rejection of the standard presumption regarding the sorts of entities that make true) for thinking that positing simple facts is not an *ad hoc* maneuver to resolve the difficult cases that confront truthmaking maximalism. I argue that simple facts are indispensable, needed to make true even the most straightforward and uncontroversial true propositions. Showing this will, I hope, suffice for taking seriously the claims that simple facts exist and are the truthmakers of the seemingly intractable truths considered above.

Those who take seriously the idea that a proposition is not true in itself recognize that truth is *grounded*. But a true proposition has other features as well. Above, I introduced and made use of the idea that a true proposition is *discriminating*—there are only certain features of the world relevant to its truth. In addition to being grounded and discriminating, I maintain that every true proposition is also *stable*, in the sense that once a proposition is true, it is always true and that if a certain kind of thing makes it true, nothing of a very different kind ever does. The argument that simple facts are indispensable rests on the idea that truth is stable in this way.

Here I take for granted what I defend in detail elsewhere: that familiar objects go out of existence *simpliciter* (rather than merely going out of existence *at a particular moment*). (See Fiocco 2007a, 2007b) Consider, then, the proposition that the ceramic owl on my desk exists (at moment, *m*).⁴⁰ It is orthodoxy that this proposition is true in virtue of the ceramic owl itself. But this owl, like all familiar objects, is not indestructible and surely at some point ceases to be. When the owl no longer exists, its non-existence does not and cannot change what once was. Hence, it is still true that the owl on my desk exists (at *m*). Despite the loss of this ceramic owl, the proposition is no less true and true in the same way. What makes [tenselessly] it true is presumably the same thing that makes it true at *m*,

40. The verb here should be construed tenselessly in order to avoid distraction by contentious issues in the metaphysics of time.

for, again, the past does not change. Therefore, what makes it true must be the sort of thing that can exist independently of the ceramic owl. It seems, then, the ceramic owl itself cannot be the truthmaker for the proposition—but neither can any state of affairs with the owl as a constituent or any mode of the ceramic owl, for such entities depend for their existence on the ceramic owl. (Merely relativizing some entity, such as a state of affairs, to the moment, *m*, is to no avail, for the state of affairs, *the ceramic owl on my desk-existing-at-m*, does not exist if the ceramic owl fails to.) I suggest that what makes the proposition true at *m*, and forever more, is the simple fact that the ceramic owl on my desk exists (at *m*).

Hence, the groundedness—and stability—of true propositions provides reason for thinking that simple facts make true even existential claims about familiar objects before us. Their need here and their use as truthmakers for the seemingly intractable truths, which, if the arguments of §II are correct, *must* have truthmakers, is strong reason for accepting an ontology that includes simple facts.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented the core of a comprehensive theory of truthmaking, one founded on the principle that for absolutely every true proposition, that proposition is true in virtue of something in the world and the idea that what any proposition, *p*, is true in virtue of—what makes *p* true—is a simple fact, namely the *simple fact that p*.

Paul Horwich characterizes a view along these lines as “the *simplest* imaginable truth-maker theory (in the sense of ‘the one that is easiest to formulate’)” and maintains that “almost everyone...in the business” rejects it.⁴¹ Such a theory is rejected on the grounds of being “ontologically *extravagant*: as postulating many more kinds of fact than are needed. For instance, it attributes the truth of <Mars is red or green> to the existence of a certain disjunctive fact: the fact that either Mars is red or Mars is green.” (Horwich 2007, 187)

The theory that I propose is indeed easy to formulate. However, it is not extravagant in the way that Horwich objects to. Although I do believe that the proposition that Mars is red or green is made true by the simple fact

41. Horwich 2009, 187. Italics in the original. Horwich does not say who does accept this sort of theory.

that Mars is red or green, this fact in itself is in no way disjunctive. The fact itself is simple. It is the same *kind* of fact—a simple fact—that makes true the existential claim that there is a ceramic owl on my desk and the negative existential claim that there are no unicorns and the claim about the past that dinosaurs once roamed the earth. As mentioned above, the logical features, such as negation or being disjunctive or past-tensed, of what is made true are not features of the world; they are features of the representations that sentient beings use to think about and characterize the world. So the ontology of this theory of truthmaking is rather parsimonious.

The truthmaker theory that I am proposing, then, is very easy to formulate and the ontology that accompanies it is not extravagant (though, of course, simple facts might be objectionable on other grounds). Nonetheless, the theory seems fully capable of doing whatever it is a theory of truthmaking is supposed to do. For instance, it is as capable as any other theory to catch “cheaters”, those who maintain that certain propositions are true and yet adopt such sparse ontologies that they lack the resources to account for what it is outside of these propositions that makes them true.⁴²

I do not, however, defend this theory of truthmaking because of what it can do, nor is my motivation for holding it, its capacity to do these things (e.g., catch cheaters). I defend the theory because it seems true: the arguments in §II seem to show that an absolute principle of truthmaking must be true, that denying it leads to contradiction, and the supplementary argument at the end of §IV presents reason for thinking that all true claims are made true by simple facts.

In closing, I note that the absoluteness of truthmaking and the sort of simplicity in the world, captured by simple facts, that underlie the theory I am proposing seem to be present regardless of how one understands truth. I observed, in the Introduction, that an absolute principle of truthmaking seems undeniable if one adopts a coherence or pragmatic theory of truth. Assuming that, given these theories, truth is stable—so that if, say, a belief is true in virtue of other beliefs with which it coheres, it is always the case that (at that moment, *m*) the belief coheres with those others, then to the extent that beliefs come and go, it must be the simple fact that the belief coheres with others (at *m*) that makes it true. Likewise, if a belief is true in virtue of certain interests or the capacities it has to contribute to such,

42. See Rami 2009, 3; Merricks 2007, 3; Sider 2001, 40 for the idea that one of the motivations for accepting a principle of truthmaking is that it enables one to “catch cheaters”.

then if, in some sense, it continues to be true after those interests have ceased to be, it must be a simple fact that makes it true in the first place. So simple facts seem to be in the world if truth is. This seems to me to be strong evidence—insofar as one has any insight into the nature of truth—that a theory of truthmaking along the lines developed here is correct.⁴³

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43. I would like to thank Johannes Brandl, Crawford Elder, Aaron Griffith, Mark Heller, Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, and Gila Sher for discussion and their helpful comments on a draft of this paper. Those of Elder and Heller were especially helpful: Elder’s enabled me to give the paper a “make-over” that changed slightly its focus and made it, I hope, more palatable; Heller’s comments were extensive and led to many improvements both in presentation and in substance, in particular, his incisive criticism forced me to revise and expand my discussion of the idea that truth merely supervenes on being. I would also like to thank my audience, which included Ruth Millikan, Barry C. Smith, and Adriano N. de Brito, at the First Congress of the Brazilian Society for Analytic Philosophy where I presented an earlier version of the paper; our discussion following the presentation was quite useful. Thanks are also due to an anonymous reader for *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, who provided astute and beneficial comments.

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