A Theory of Truthmaking

Metaphysics, Ontology, and Reality

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Contents

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.

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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 over-reaction 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

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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

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[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

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[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

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[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.

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

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[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 super-assertibility 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*.

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[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

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[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."

PART I

Foundations

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.

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[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 truth-makers, 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

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[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.

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

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[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

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[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 truth-maker. 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 truth-maker 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

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[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*

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[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

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[16] See also Tallant 2018: 11.

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

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[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 truth-makers 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 prov-ince in the explanation of truth is an optional view, and one which dialectically weakens truthmaker theory by front-loading it with conten-tious 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

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. Further-more, 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

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[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.

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[10] Though not really. See Chang 2004.