A thing, just by existing, can make a claim true. Thus Aristotle:

If there is a man, the statement whereby we say that there is a man is true, and reciprocally—since if the statement whereby we say that there is a man is true, there is a man. And whereas the true statement is in no way the cause of the actual thing’s existence, the actual thing does seem in some way the cause of the statement’s being true: it is because the actual thing exists or does not that the statement is called true or false. (Categories 14b15–22; 1984: 22)

Some claims are true because a thing exists. Truthmaker says that this is so for every true claim. That is, Truthmaker says that for every true claim there is something or other that—just by existing—makes that claim true. In other words, Truthmaker says that every truth has a ‘truthmaker’. This chapter presents the central motivations for Truthmaker and begins to explore the making true relation.

I. Motivating Truthmaker

Bertrand Russell endorses Truthmaker throughout The Philosophy of Logical Atomism, insisting that each truth is made true by a ‘fact’. J. L. Austin likewise embraces Truthmaker, saying: ‘When a statement is true, there is, of course, a state of
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affairs which makes it true’ (1979: 123). More recently, a growing number of philosophers have been insisting that, for each truth, there is something that makes it true. These include, among many others, William P. Alston (1996: 52), Kit Fine (1982: 69), E. J. Lowe (1998: 245), C. B. Martin (see Armstrong 1989a), and, most adamantly and prolifically, David Armstrong (e.g., 1997 and 2004).

Truthmaker and closely related theses have been widely endorsed and nowadays seem to be gaining new momentum. Yet even Armstrong confesses: ‘The truth-maker principle seems to me to be fairly obvious once attention is drawn to it, but I do not know how to argue for it further’ (1989b: 89). Elsewhere, Armstrong follows up the claim that he has no argument for Truthmaker with: ‘My hope is that philosophers of realist inclinations will be immediately attracted to the idea that a truth, any truth, should depend for its truth [on] something ‘outside’ it, in virtue of which it is true’ (2004: 7).

Similarly, David Lewis defends a related thesis by simply assuming Truthmaker as a starting-point and then scaling it back in light of various objections (Lewis 2001). Elsewhere, Lewis just asserts without argument that Truthmaker aims to preserve something ‘right and important and underappreciated. What’s right, roughly speaking, is that truths must have things as their subject matter’ (1999a: 206).

No one gives much of an argument for Truthmaker. Instead, Truthmaker’s 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. Truthmaker’s defenders then maintain that Truthmaker is the best way to articulate that dependence.¹ This is Truthmaker’s primary motivation.

¹ Not everyone agrees that Truthmaker is the best way to articulate that dependence. Ch. 4 examines a competing articulation.
Perhaps we can better appreciate this primary motivation by approaching it indirectly. So consider:

(i) If Queen Elizabeth II had been born in seventeenth-century Japan, she would have been a samurai warrior.

Many will object that (i) is not true. Now I suppose that you could object to (i) by arguing that, had Her Britannic Majesty been born in Japan 400 years ago, she would have been a geisha, rather than a samurai. But I am confident that most who object to (i) do so because they object to all substantive claims about what the Queen would have been like, had she been born long ago in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Those who thus object might insist that nothing could make true any substantive claim about what HRH would have been like, had she been born in Japan in the seventeenth century. Therefore, they conclude, neither (i) nor any other such claim is true. This argument presupposes that a truth must be ‘made true’ by something. And so those who find this argument against (i) compelling should support something like Truthmaker.

I do not know of any philosopher who endorses (i). But Armstrong, Lewis, and Martin object that some do endorse other claims that are not made true by being (see Lewis 1999a: 207). That is, they object that some philosophers cheat by violating something like Truthmaker. Indeed, Theodore Sider goes so far as to say that catching these cheaters is the whole point of Truthmaker (2001: 40). (Later chapters examine a variety of alleged cheaters.) And insofar as we think that those who violate something like Truthmaker really are cheating, we should endorse Truthmaker or some similar claim.

‘Catch the cheaters’ is not really a second motivation for Truthmaker, to be added to the primary motivation already noted. It is, instead, that primary motivation seen in a different

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2 I first heard the slogan ‘Catch the cheaters’ in a talk by Sider.
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light. For that primary motivation, which is the idea or intuition or insight that truth depends in a substantive way on what exists, is not consistent with every possible claim. As a result, there are theories that violate truth’s supposed non-trivial dependence on being. Defenders of these theories are the cheaters. That is, they ‘cheat’ only because they defend theories inconsistent with truth’s supposed non-trivial dependence on being. So opposition to cheaters and the idea that truth depends substantively on being are two sides of a single coin.

Truthmaker does not require that each truth have just one truthmaker or each truthmaker just one truth. For example, Truthmaker allows that Aristotle himself made it true not only that Aristotle exists, but also that a human exists. And Truthmaker allows that that a human exists was made true not only by Aristotle, but also by Plato. Along similar lines, Truthmaker does not say that truthmakers must somehow ‘mirror the structure’ of what they make true. For example, although it makes no sense to say that Aristotle was ‘disjunctive’, he made it true that either Aristotle exists or a kangaroo exists.

Suppose, somewhat controversially, that a truth can ‘correspond’ to something that does not mirror its structure. More to the point, suppose that each truth does indeed correspond to something, which something is thereby that truth’s truthmaker. This suggests a connection between Truthmaker and the ‘correspondence theory of truth’. In fact, some philosophers take Truthmaker just to be the correspondence theory. Here is John Bigelow: ‘The hallowed path from language to universals has been by way of the correspondence theory of truth: the doctrine that whenever something is true, there must be something in the world which makes it true. I will call this the Truthmaker axiom’ (1988: 122).

David Armstrong (1997: 128–31; 2000: 150; 2004: 16–17), George Molnar (2000: 85), and Alex Oliver (1996: 69) also identify Truthmaker with the correspondence theory. The best reason for thinking they are right is that familiar questions about the
correspondence theory seem to be equivalent to familiar questions about Truthmaker. Compare: ‘What is the corresponding to relation?’ and ‘What is the making true relation?’ Or: ‘To what do negative existential truths (e.g., that hobbits do not exist) correspond?’ and ‘What are the truthmakers for negative existential truths?’

So suppose, just for the sake of argument, that the correspondence theory is Truthmaker by another name. (But it is not; see §IV and Ch. 2, §IV.) Then to take the correspondence theory as a premiss and Truthmaker as a conclusion is to beg the question. So there is no good argument from the correspondence theory to Truthmaker. Nevertheless, the correspondence theory might be a particularly effective way to express the intuition that truth depends on being, an intuition that Truthmaker purports to clarify. Now we are back to the primary motivation for Truthmaker: the intuition that truth depends on being—and so to violate this dependence is to cheat.

II. Necessitarianism and Conditional Necessitarianism

Necessitarianism says that a truthmaker necessitates that which it makes true. That is, necessitarianism says that, for all \( x \) and all \( p \), \( x \) is a truthmaker for \( p \) only if \( x \)’s mere existence is metaphysically sufficient for \( p \)’s truth. Necessitarianism’s defenders include David Armstrong (2003: 12; 2004: 6–7), Kit Fine (1982: 69), John F. Fox (1987: 189), George Molnar (2000: 84), and Barry Smith (1999: 276). Understood as a necessary condition for making true, necessitarianism is now truthmaker orthodoxy.\(^3\)

This section, along with the section that follows, considers how to formulate (or reformulate) necessitarianism, the

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\(^3\) There are heretics. Consider Bertrand Russell. He was a truthmaker theorist whose views on modality guarantee that he would have rejected necessitarianism (see Russell 1985: 96–7).
implications of necessitarianism, and what motivates necessitarianism in the first place. This will involve a lot of detail about what, at times, might seem like fairly narrow and somewhat technical issues. But these details must be addressed, since only by fully understanding necessitarianism can we hope to understand Truthmaker itself. For necessitarianism offers (by far) the least controversial necessary condition for \textit{making true}, the relation at the heart of Truthmaker.

In fact, necessitarianism is the only widely endorsed claim among truthmaker theorists that begins to take Truthmaker from a rough idea—the idea that every truth is ‘made true’ by something—to a clearly formulated thesis. Moreover, as we shall see in later chapters, truthmaker theorists actually charge a view with cheating just in case that view is committed to truths that are not necessitated by what exists. Without necessitarianism, the cheater-catching business, as it has actually been run, is bankrupt.

Our examination of necessitarianism begins with a look at one of its apparent implications, an implication regarding the primary bearers of truth. Truthmaker itself seems to be neutral with respect to those primary bearers. \textit{Qua} truthmaker theorist, so it seems, one could take them to be abstract propositions or beliefs or sentence tokens or what have you. But if necessitarianism really is part and parcel of Truthmaker, Truthmaker arguably delivers a direct argument for abstract propositions.\footnote{I shall say that propositions are ‘abstract’ if they have no spatial location and cannot be identified with sentences (or other linguistic items) or beliefs. And I shall assume that abstract propositions exist necessarily.}

That argument begins with:

(2) At least one electron exists.

When it comes to truthmakers for (2), we have an embarrassment of riches. Each and every electron does the trick. Thus electron $E$ does the trick. Given necessitarianism, truthmakers
necessitate their respective truths. So, in every world in which $E$ exists, (2) is true.\textsuperscript{5}

(2) is true in every world in which $E$ exists. So (2) is true in $W$, which contains only $E$ (and whatever $E$ necessitates). $W$ is bereft of language and believers. So, in $W$, (2) itself is neither a linguistic item nor a belief. It seems that that truth could only be an abstract proposition. In this way, Truthmaker combined with necessitarianism seems to lead directly to abstract propositions.

This sort of argument, which relies on necessitarianism, has vexed some truthmaker theorists.\textsuperscript{6} So it would be nice to avoid it altogether. Happily, we can offer a substitute for necessitarianism that undermines this argument, even while accommodating what motivates necessitarianism.

Let conditional necessitarianism be the denial of necessitarianism conjoined with the claim that, for all $x$ and $p$, if $x$ is a truthmaker for $p$, then, necessarily, if both $x$ and $p$ exist, then $p$ is true.\textsuperscript{7} The conditional necessitarian can say that while $E$ is

\textsuperscript{5} I assume that electrons are essentially electrons. (If $E$ is possibly a proton, then it is possible for $E$ to exist but (2) be false.) Those who reject this assumption can replace (2) with, for example, \textit{that at least one thing that is possibly an electron exists.}

\textsuperscript{6} David Armstrong endorses ‘naturalism’, which he takes to be the thesis that ‘the world, the totality of entities, is nothing more than the spacetime system’ (1997: 5). And he says: ‘no Naturalist can be happy with a realm of [abstract] propositions’ (1997: 13). But Armstrong also says:

Notice that Necessitarianism seems to require that we take truths as propositions rather than as beliefs, statements, and such. Truthmakers, entities in the world, can hardly necessitate beliefs and statements about these entities, generally at least. What are propositions, then? I think that they are the \textit{intentional objects} of actual or possible beliefs, statements and so on. I hope to give a naturalist, empiricist and, to a degree, deflationary account of intentional objects. All this, however, must be left aside here. (2003: 12)

In a more recent work, Armstrong says that propositions cannot be actual intentional objects, since there are worlds with propositions but no intentional objects. Thus he says, ‘propositions taken as \textit{possible} intentional objects are the only things that truthmakers can actually \textit{necessitate}’ (2004: 16).

\textsuperscript{7} Conditional necessitarianism is equivalent to the claim that if $x$ is a truthmaker for $p$, then it is impossible that $x$ exist and $p$ have a truth-value other than true (or
a truthmaker for (2), $E$ would not make (2) true in a world in which $E$ alone (and all that $E$ alone necessitates) exists. For in that world neither (2) nor any other truth-bearer would exist to be made true.

It is easy to see that conditional necessitarianism undermines the above argument for abstract propositions. What is not yet clear is that conditional necessitarianism accommodates what motivates necessitarianism. For we have yet to examine those motivations. Let us start our examination with this from Armstrong’s *Truth and Truthmakers*:

But what is the argument for saying that a truthmaker must necessitate a truth it is truthmaker for? Here is an argument by *reductio*. Suppose that a suggested truthmaker $T$ for a certain truth $p$ fails to necessitate that truth. There will then be at least the possibility that $T$ should exist and yet the proposition $p$ not be true. This strongly suggests that there ought to be some further condition that must be satisfied in order for $p$ to be true. [Let this condition be] the existence of a further entity, $U$ … [Then] $T + U$ would appear to be the true and necessitating truthmaker for $p$. (2004: 6–7; see also Armstrong 1997: 115–16; Bigelow 1988: 126; and Molnar 2000: 84)

Consider a putative truthmaker $T$ for a proposition $p$. Suppose that $T$ fails to necessitate $p$’s truth. Then, Armstrong assumes, lack a truth-value altogether). Armstrong endorses something close to conditional necessitarianism when he says: ‘if a certain truthmaker makes a certain truth true, then there is no alternative world where that truthmaker exists but that truth is a false proposition’ (1997: 115). Oddly, Armstrong identifies this thesis with necessitarianism.

In fact, Armstrong’s argument is a bit more complicated than this. He says: This [further] condition must either be the existence of a further entity, $U$, or a further truth, $q$. In the first of these cases, $T + U$ would appear to be the true and necessitating truthmaker for $p$ … In the second case, $q$ either has a truthmaker, $V$, or it does not. Given that $q$ has a truthmaker, then the $T + U$ case is reproduced. Suppose $q$ lacks a truthmaker, then there are truths without truthmakers. (2004: 7)

I do not think that this complication involving $q$ makes a fundamental difference to Armstrong’s argument. For, as Armstrong himself says, assuming that $q$ has a truthmaker, ‘the $T + U$ case is reproduced’.
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$T$ can be combined with some $U$ to yield an entity whose existence is sufficient for $p$’s truth, which new entity is $p$’s bona fide truthmaker. Thus Armstrong assumes that for any true $p$, there is always some entity (such as $T + U$) that is suitable for making $p$ true and whose mere existence necessitates $p$’s truth. This assumption is a poor premiss in an argument for necessitarianism, since only someone already committed to necessitarianism would find that assumption attractive.

Armstrong’s comments do, however, inspire a more persuasive argument. Suppose there are two ‘contenders’ to be the truthmaker for $p : T + U$, which necessitates $p$, and $T$ alone, which does not. Even those on the fence about truthmaker necessitarianism might agree that, everything else being equal, $T + U$, in virtue of necessitating $p$, has a better claim to making $p$ true than does $T$. We should ask why $T + U$, in virtue of necessitating $p$, has the better claim. One plausible answer is that such necessitation is at least partly constitutive of making true, which would imply necessitarianism.

Those who deny that $p$ is an abstract proposition might balk at supposing that $T + U$ really could necessitate $p$. But they will allow $T + U$ to conditionally necessitate $p$. And I think it is plausible that if $T + U$ conditionally necessitates $p$, but $T$ does not, then $T + U$ has a leg up on $T$ with respect to being $p$’s truthmaker. This can lead us to conclude that conditional necessitation is at least partly constitutive of making true. This argument for conditional necessitarianism seems to be no less compelling than the previous argument for necessitarianism. Moreover, this argument seems to accommodate what intuitively motivates that previous argument.

Here is another argument for necessitarianism. Recall:

(2) At least one electron exists.

Electron $E$’s making (2) true is a paradigm case of truthmaking. And surely—so this argument goes—$E$ necessitates (2). For suppose, for reductio, that it did not. That is, suppose that,
possibly, \( E \) exists and (2) fails to be true. This implies that, possibly, \( E \) exists and (2) is false. But that implication is absurd; it is absurd to say both that an electron exists and also that it is false that at least one electron exists. So \( E \) necessitates (2). And, given that \( E \)’s making (2) true is a paradigmatic case of truthmaking, the result here generalizes. Therefore, necessitarianism is true.

Those who do not already accept the existence of abstract propositions can resist the above reductio. For suppose that (2) is not an abstract proposition. Suppose that (2) exists contingently. This suggests that, possibly, \( E \) exists and (2) does not. Suppose that is indeed possible. If (2) does not exist, then (2) has no properties, and so no truth-value. So we can now conclude that, possibly, \( E \) exists and (2) is neither true nor false. In this way, those who deny that (2) is an abstract proposition can reject as invalid the above argument’s move from ‘possibly, \( E \) exists and (2) fails to be true’ to ‘possibly, \( E \) exists and (2) is false’.

The above argument by reductio should persuade only those already committed to abstract propositions. So that argument fails. Nevertheless, there is something to be learned from that argument. It is that whether or not we are initially inclined to think that truth-bearers exist necessarily, we should all agree that necessarily, if both \( E \) and (2) exist, then (2) is true.\(^9\) And this is of course what conditional necessitarianism demands. So I think that truthmaker theorists ought to reject straight necessitarianism only if they embrace conditional necessitarianism. For truthmaker theorists should say that every truth stands to something or other in the way that (2) stands to \( E \).

If there are abstract propositions, conditional necessitarianism collapses into straight necessitarianism. \((If \ x \ and \ p \ exist\)

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\(^9\) Suppose you take the primary truth-bearers to be sentence tokens. Arguably, sentence tokens have their meanings contingently. So you may want to say: if \( E \) exists and (2) exists and (2) means that \( E \) exists, then (2) is true. I’ll ignore this complication in what follows.
ends up collapsing, since \( p \) exists of necessity, into \( \text{if } x \text{ exists.} \) On the other hand, if there are no abstract propositions, conditional necessitarianism is the better option, since straight necessitarianism is arguably committed to such propositions.

In what follows, I shall not make much of the difference between necessitarianism and conditional necessitarianism. Nor do the arguments that follow usually turn on the nature of the primary bearers of truth. But, for what it is worth, I shall be thinking of truths as true abstract propositions, and shall often refer to them with italicized that-clauses.

III. Truthmaker and \textit{de re} Modality

Necessitarianism says that, for all \( x \) and all \( p \), if \( x \) makes \( p \) true, it is not possible that \( x \) exist and \( p \) fail to be true. It says, in other words, that if \( x \) is a truthmaker for \( p \), then \( x \) is \textit{essentially} such that \( p \) is true. Something similar goes for conditional necessitarianism. So Truthmaker, given either version of necessitarianism, is committed to \textit{de re} modality.

John Bigelow’s account of the necessitation involved in truthmaking parts ways with both varieties of necessitarianism. For Bigelow’s account invokes only \textit{de dicto} modality. Bigelow says: ‘I suppose that entailment is to be a relation between propositions (whatever they are). Truthmaker should not be construed as saying that an object entails a truth; rather, it requires that the proposition \textit{that the object exists} entails the truth in question’ (Bigelow 1988: 126). Bigelow agrees with other truthmaker theorists that an object can be a truthmaker. And he agrees with necessitarianism that an object’s existence somehow necessitates any claim that it makes true. But he glosses the relevant necessitation in terms of entailment: an object \( O \) thus necessitates \( p \) if and only if \textit{that \( O \) exists} entails \( p \).\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Bigelow also suggests that truthmaker necessitarianism says that an object entails a truth. But necessitarianism does not say this. Necessitarianism says,
This chapter defends the following: Truthmaker requires states of affairs, among other things, to serve as truthmakers; truthmaking states of affairs have certain of their constituents essentially; a truth is ‘about’ its truthmaker; and some properties are not fit to be the constituents of truthmaking states of affairs.

In combination, this chapter’s conclusions present a clear picture of what truthmakers must be like. In other words, they present a clear picture of the sorts of entities to which Truthmaker is committed. Moreover, the conclusion that a truth is ‘about’ its truthmaker implies that there is more to the relation of making true than just necessitation.

I. States of Affairs as Truthmakers

Some truthmakers are humdrum and uncontroversial. Consider Fido the dog. Fido is a truthmaker for *that Fido exists*. But not all alleged truthmakers are as pedestrian as Fido. Suppose that Fido is brown. Then the following is true:

(i) Fido is brown.

Fido is contingently brown. He could have been black. Suppose he had been. Then Fido would have existed, but (i) would have
been false. So Fido does not even conditionally necessitate that (i) is true. So Fido is not a truthmaker for (i).

Perhaps Truthmaker should permit ‘joint truthmakers’. That is, perhaps Truthmaker should say that each truth is made true by some thing or things. If so, then Truthmaker allows that there are some truths such that, for each of those truths, there is nothing that, simply by existing, necessitates that truth. But Truthmaker then insists that, for each of those truths, there are some things such that, necessarily, if all of them exist, then that truth is true. With this in mind, one might suggest that (i)’s joint truthmakers are Fido and the property of being brown. But that will not work. For it is possible for both Fido and that property to exist even if the former fails to exemplify the latter, even if (i) is false.

David Armstrong would say that the truthmaker for (i) is a state of affairs. This state of affairs is not supposed to be an abstract entity that exists necessarily, whether or not it ‘obtains’. For Armstrong’s states of affairs are not the ‘states of affairs’ of Alvin Plantinga (1974) or Roderick Chisholm (1976). Instead, Armstrong’s states of affairs are complex entities constituted by objects and properties.

As Armstrong (1997: 5) explicitly notes, his states of affairs just are Bertrand Russell’s facts. Armstrong takes an object’s exemplifying a property to be a paradigmatic state of affairs. Similarly, Russell tells us: ‘The simplest imaginable facts are those which consist in the possession of a quality by some particular thing’ (1985: 59; see also Russell 1907: 45; 1919: 1–6). One thing’s being related to another thing is an example of a more complex fact or state of affairs.

Armstrong’s states of affairs and Russell’s facts are also events, at least given one very familiar way of understanding events. Thus Russell’s The Philosophy of Logical Atomism illustrates J. M. Shorter’s observation that ‘the word “fact” … did at one time fairly clearly mean (roughly) what “actual event”
means’ (1962: 283). In keeping with the terminology of the various authors discussed in this book, I shall use ‘states of affairs’, ‘facts’, and ‘events’ interchangeably.

As already noted, Armstrong would say that (i)—that Fido is brown—is made true by a state of affairs. Russell (1985) would agree, saying that (i) is made true by a fact. The state (of affairs) or fact or event of Fido’s being brown is the most obvious candidate. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that that state could have had different constituents. Suppose, for example, that Fido’s being brown could have been constituted by Fido and being black. If that state had been constituted by Fido and being black, then that state would have existed, and it would have been true that Fido is black. More to the point, that state would have existed and (i) would have been false. And if it is possible for that state to exist and (i) to be false, then that state is not (i)’s truthmaker.

So if Fido’s being brown makes (i) true, then that state is essentially constituted by Fido and being brown. In general, if a state of affairs makes a claim true in virtue of the objects and properties that constitute that state, then that state is constituted by those objects and properties essentially. Similarly, if

1 Russell (1940) is an even nicer illustration, treating ‘fact’ and ‘event’ as synonymous. Nowadays, ‘fact’ typically means true proposition (or uncontroversially known proposition). Taking a fact to be a true abstract proposition goes back at least to Frege (1997b: 342). In 1904, Russell himself would have said that a fact was a true proposition, but only because he took true propositions to be (what we would call) events (see Ch. 8, §IV).

2 More carefully, if a state of affairs makes p true in virtue of the objects and properties that constitute that state, then that state is not possibly constituted by other objects and properties such that, possibly, if the state is constituted by those objects and properties, then p is not true. (For example, suppose that the state of Fido’s being brown makes that Fido is brown or black true. It does not follow that being brown is an essential constituent of that state. What follows, instead, is that that state is not possibly constituted by any property other than being brown or being black.) I shall ignore this qualification in the text. For, even given this qualification, Truthmaker has a ‘controversial consequence’ about the essential constituents of states of affairs, which, as we shall see, is the main point here.
some states jointly make a claim true, the constituents of those states that play a role in making that claim true are themselves essential to their respective states.

With this in mind, consider the wide variety of properties and objects that must be essential constituents of the state (or states) that is (or are) the truthmaker (or joint truthmakers) for that Murphy’s thoughts about the argument on page 627 of his dog-eared copy of Leviathan, which thoughts occurred from 12:15 to 12:17 on October 1, 2004, were confused at the beginning yet, through fits and starts, managed to make legitimate if moderate progress in four areas, those four areas being ….

Indeed, even a relatively simple truth might have an extremely complex truthmaker. Consider, once again:

(1) Fido is brown.

Some truthmaker theorists will deny that (1)’s truthmaker is the state of Fido’s having the property of being brown, which state has Fido and being brown essentially. For some will insist on a ‘sparse’ theory of properties, according to which the only real properties are fundamental or primitive. That is, they will insist that the only real properties are not reduced to or analysed in terms of other properties. And any such philosopher will follow Armstrong (1978: 17) and deny that being brown exists at all, and so deny that being brown is a constituent of any state of affairs.

Given a sparse theory of properties, the truthmaker for (1) would have to be a complex state of affairs (or complex array of jointly truthmaking states of affairs) constituted by a wide variety of fundamental properties and their relations one to another, which essentially constitute the state (or states) involved. So the truthmaker for (1) might be no less convoluted than that for the above claim involving Murphy’s thoughts.

But whatever we conclude about the exact nature of (1)’s truthmaker(s), I think we should join Armstrong and Russell
and others in saying that only a state (or states) of affairs could make \((i)\) true.\(^3\) And so it goes for the truthmakers for many other truths. Thus we have Truthmaker’s first controversial consequence: the world includes not only objects and properties, but also states of affairs.

Suppose that \((i)\)’s truthmaker is the state of \textit{Fido’s being brown}. Then that state has both Fido and \textit{being brown} as essential constituents. Something similar goes for other truthmaking states of affairs. Thus Truthmaker’s second controversial consequence is that, for every truth involving objects, properties, and relations, there is some state (or states) constituted by those objects, properties, and relations essentially.

These controversial consequences show that Truthmaker is a substantive thesis that needs to be motivated. They also show that, at least as far as \((i)\) is concerned, Truthmaker outstrips its primary motivation. After all, Truthmaker agrees that if \((i)\) is

\(^3\) Armstrong’s principal argument for the existence of states of affairs is that they are needed for truthmaking (see, e.g., Armstrong 1997: 116–19; but see also Armstrong 2004: 48–9). Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith (1984) make do with tropes or individual property instances in place of states of affairs. They would say that the trope of \textit{Fido’s brownness}, by its mere existence, guarantees \((i)\)’s truth. But I shall focus on Russell’s and Armstrong’s approach to truthmaking. Their approach has been the more influential, perhaps because states of affairs or events are less controversial than tropes. (And even Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984: 295–6) slide between tropes and states of affairs in their account of truthmakers.)

Besides, my arguments regarding states of affairs as truthmakers can always be adapted to tropes. For example, this section will point out that Truthmaker has a controversial ontological implication and a controversial modal commitment; and it will say that this implies that Truthmaker outstrips its primary motivation. That point is made with states of affairs. But the same point could be made with tropes: if Truthmaker relied on tropes, it would imply, first, that tropes exist and, second, that they are essentially tropes of the entity of which they are actually tropes. (If \textit{Fido’s brownness} could be the brownness of Spot, then the mere existence of that trope would not necessitate the truth of \textit{that Fido is brown}; see Armstrong 1989b: 117–18.) Here is another example. §IV argues that Truthmaker must say that some (alleged) properties may not constitute truthmaking states of affairs. That argument can easily be adapted to show that Truthmaker must deny a truthmaking role to certain (alleged) tropes.
true, then Fido exists and is brown. Truthmaker then adds that there must be a state of affairs along the lines of *Fido’s being brown*, having its truthmaking constituents essentially. But this addition is not motivated by Truthmaker’s primary motivation. For (i)’s truth ‘depends on the world’ just so long as Fido exists and is brown (see Dodd 2002; McGrath 2003: 682–3). And just so long as one grants that Fido exists and is brown, one does not cheat by saying that (i) is true.

Given only what I have said thus far, it is an open question whether every truth is relevantly like (i). That is, it is an open question whether we can accommodate Truthmaker’s primary motivation with respect to every truth without somehow committing ourselves to Truthmaker itself. Chapter 4 explores an alternative to Truthmaker that purports to do just that. As we shall see, our exploration of that alternative will build on points made about Truthmaker below, in this chapter and the next.

**II. Necessary Truths**

Necessitation (or conditional necessitation) is one ingredient of *making true* (Ch. 1, §§II–III). In fact, for all we have said so far, (conditional) necessitation could be the whole story. That is, it could be that there is nothing more to *making true* than (conditional) necessitation.

For the sake of argument, suppose that there is nothing more. Suppose that for all \(x\) and all \(p\), \(x\) makes \(p\) true if and only if, necessarily, if \(x\) exists (and \(p\) exists), then \(p\) is true. This has the result that each and every existing thing is a truthmaker for every necessary truth. It has this result because, for all \(x\) and all \(p\), necessarily, \(p\) is true implies necessarily, if \(x\) exists, then \(p\) is true.

This result is familiar (see, e.g., Armstrong 2003: 14). David Lewis points it out as soon as he articulates Truthmaker, an articulation that seems to equate *making true* with necessitation:
In a slogan: every truth has a truthmaker. Spelled out at greater length: for any true proposition \( P \), there exists something \( T \) such that \( T \)’s existence strictly implies (necessitates) \( P \). … if \( P \) is a necessary proposition, then for any \( T \) whatever, \( T \)’s existence strictly implies \( P \). So the Truthmaker Principle, as I have stated it, applies only trivially to necessary truths. (2001: 604)

Unlike Lewis, Barry Smith does not say that Truthmaker applies only trivially to necessary truths. Smith says, instead, that Truthmaker does not apply to them at all. For Smith takes Truthmaker to be the view that ‘reality constrains the practice of judgment by determining which contingent judgments are true’ (1999: 274, emphasis added; see also Armstrong 1989b: 88).

So Lewis concedes that Truthmaker applies only trivially to necessary truths. And Smith concedes that it applies not at all. But, I shall argue, neither concession should be acceptable to those who defend Truthmaker in the first place. (I myself am happy to say that at least some necessary truths lack truthmakers, but that is because I think that Truthmaker is false.)

My argument begins by supposing that you deny that there are any mathematical entities. You deny that there are mathematical properties. And you deny that mathematical claims can be, in any sense, reduced to or analysed in terms of or constituted by any of the other objects and properties that you do believe in. Yet you add that Fermat’s Last Theorem (FLT) is true.

4 Lewis (2001: 604) goes on to say: ‘A non-trivial principle requiring truthmakers for necessary truths would presumably replace strict implication by some more discriminating sort of relevant or paraconsistent implication.’ But since the necessitation involved in truthmaking is not a relation between propositions alone (Ch. 1, §III), I do not think it can be captured by any logic of implication. (Lewis here cites Restall (1996); but Restall suggests only a way to keep everything from appropriately necessitating necessary truths of the form \( A \lor \neg A \); he is silent about other necessary truths.)

5 FLT says that the following equation has no non-zero integer solutions for \( x, y, \) and \( z \) where \( n > 2 \): \( x^n + y^n = z^n \).
Truthmaker theorists, let us suppose, think you are cheating. So they charge that, when it comes to the truth of FLT, you do not respect the dependence of what is true on what there is. You plead not guilty. For you say that your left thumb is a (trivial) truthmaker for FLT, since, necessarily, if your left thumb exists, FLT is true.

If your thumb were a truthmaker for FLT, then your affirming your thumb’s existence would thereby refute the charge that you cheat. But surely your affirming this does not refute that charge. Instead, your belief in your thumb’s existence seems to be totally irrelevant to whether you cheat in endorsing FLT. All of this implies that, even if we call your thumb a ‘trivial truthmaker’ for FLT, your thumb is not really a truthmaker for FLT. For, again, if it were a truthmaker for FLT, your endorsing its existence would refute the charge that you cheat.

Your thumb is not a truthmaker of any sort for FLT. And, in general, a ‘trivial truthmaker’ is not really a truthmaker at all. As a result, it is a mistake to say both that necessary truths must have truthmakers and also that those truthmakers can be trivial. We should not both accuse defenders of a necessary truth of cheating unless they offer a truthmaker and also acquit them of cheating when they offer a ‘trivial truthmaker’. Necessary truths require only ‘trivial truthmakers’ just in case necessary truths do not require truthmakers at all.

So suppose that necessary truths do not require truthmakers at all. Some might take this to mean that necessary truths are counterexamples to Truthmaker, and therefore that Truthmaker should be rejected outright. But let us not take it that way. Let us take it, instead, as a suggested friendly amendment to Truthmaker. I shall now give four reasons that Truthmaker should not be thus amended, four reasons that those who defend Truthmaker should not ratchet it back so that it applies only to contingent truths.

First, whenever putative cheaters find themselves committed to truthmakerless truths, they can say that those truths are—
just like necessary truths—exempt from the demands of Truthmaker. And it is hard to see how truthmaker theorists can object, in a principled way, to this strategy, once they themselves have exempted some truths from Truthmaker. And so truthmaker theorists, being cheater catchers, should not exempt necessary truths.

Second, recall from Chapter 1 (§I) that Truthmaker is motivated by the idea that ‘a truth, any truth, should depend for its truth [on] something “outside” it, in virtue of which it is true’ (Armstrong 2004: 7). Obviously enough, this idea about ‘a truth, any truth’ encompasses necessary truths. So a version of Truthmaker that fails to apply to necessary truths is inconsistent with the intuition that motivated Truthmaker in the first place, the intuition that truth depends substantively on being.

My third reason begins by supposing that that God exists is necessarily true. Even though I reject Truthmaker, I think that that God exists must have a truthmaker: namely, God. And, more importantly, those who endorse Truthmaker should agree. That is, any truthmaker theorist ought to reject out of hand this conjunction: that God exists is necessarily true and that God exists has no truthmaker. Therefore, it is false that Truthmaker should make no demands on necessary truths. Even a ratcheted-back version of Truthmaker must recognize that some purported necessary truths would require truthmakers.

Suppose our ratcheted-back version of Truthmaker does recognize this. Nevertheless, it still says that some necessary truths do not need truthmakers. Which necessary truths do not? It seems to be all and only those necessary truths for which we can find no truthmaker. For example, it is hard to come up with an intuitively satisfying truthmaker for FLT. So we exempt FLT from the demands of Truthmaker. On the other hand, if we did locate a truthmaker for FLT, I bet that we would insist that FLT requires a truthmaker.

This way of proceeding robs Truthmaker of any pretensions to be a principled catcher of cheaters that may have
survived Truthmaker’s descent from being entirely unrestricted to exempting all necessary truths. For truthmaker theorists who thus proceed surely have no principled way to object to wily cheaters who proceed likewise. These are the cheaters who, when faced with some apparently truthmakerless truths, simply amend Truthmaker—perhaps even one truth at a time—so that those truths are not within its purview.

The fourth and final reason that Truthmaker should not exempt necessary truths will appeal only to those who accept the correspondence theory of truth and see it as motivating Truthmaker. But this includes many of the most prominent truthmaker theorists (Ch. 1, §I). Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the correspondence theory is correct. Then it is analytic that each necessary truth, in virtue of being true, corresponds to something. For thus corresponding is *what it is* to be true. Lest the correspondence theory fail to motivate Truthmaker, that to which a truth corresponds is thereby a truthmaker for that truth. So necessary truths have truthmakers.

In light of the above four reasons, truthmaker theorists should insist that necessary truths have genuine (non-trivial) truthmakers. Not everything is a genuine truthmaker for each necessary truth. But everything necessitates each necessary truth. Therefore, there is more to *making true* than mere necessitation.

One way of putting the principal motivation for Truthmaker suggests what this ‘more’ might be. Recall Lewis’s remark that Truthmaker aims to preserve something ‘right and important and underappreciated. What’s right, roughly speaking, is that truths must have *things* as their subject matter’ (Lewis 1999a: 206). Suppose that truths are about things. And suppose that Truthmaker does aim to preserve this. Then Truthmaker should say that each truth’s truthmaker is that which that truth is about. For only then would the existence of a truthmaker for a truth imply that there is something that that truth is about.
If all this is right, then truths are about things, which things are the truthmakers for those truths. Above I noted that your thumb fails to be a genuine truthmaker for FLT. But I did not explain why it fails. I can now explain. Even though your thumb’s existence necessitates FLT’s truth, FLT is not about your thumb. And bona fide truthmakers are that which their respective truths are about.

George Molnar tells us: ‘There are philosophers who hold that whereas contingent truths need a truthmaker, necessary truths do not.’

Molnar opposes these philosophers, at least when it comes to ‘material’ necessary truths.

Although there may be some necessary truths that are not in need of truthmakers, namely, formal truths (the truth-functional tautologies), material necessary statements are, prima facie, just modally strong claims about the world. . . . Materially necessary truths are claims about the world that are true not just ‘as things are’ but ‘as things are and no matter how things could be’. It is qua claim about the world that true statements need a truthmaker and not qua modally weak claim. The thesis that necessary truths do not make any claims about the world has never struck me as having any plausibility except when applied to tautologies. (Molnar 2000: 74–5)

Molnar suggests that ‘material truths’ are about the world, but ‘formal truths’ are not. So he would resist Lewis’s claim that all truths are about things. Rather, Molnar would say that only material truths are about things. And so he requires truthmakers for material necessary truths but not for formal necessary truths.

Armstrong, Molnar, and others give the impression that an army of philosophers runs about (presumably, runs about Australia) insisting on genuine truthmakers for all and only contingent truths. But these philosophers are not cited, and few (if any) philosophers unequivocally endorse this position in print. (Above I quoted Smith as saying that only contingent truths have truthmakers, but in the same article he denies that all contingent truths have truthmakers (see Smith 1999: 284–5).)
I think that *that bachelors are bachelors* is about things: namely, bachelors (see Sider 2003: 200). This is one reason that I do not go along with all that Molnar says above. Moreover, I think that the primary bearers of truth are propositions, rather than (for example) sentence tokens; and I have doubts about the material/formal distinction as applied to propositions, as opposed to (for example) sentence tokens. This is a second reason that I am not inclined to go along with Molnar here.

But set those reasons aside. For even if Molnar is right, some necessary truths have genuine truthmakers. So we can conclude that necessitation is not all there is to making true. Moreover, the idea that a truth is somehow about its truthmaker is implicit in how Molnar draws the material/formal distinction. Thus Molnar’s overall position here supports, rather than undermines, the two main conclusions of this section.

III. More on a Truth’s Being about its Truthmaker

The two main conclusions of the previous section were that (conditional) necessitation is not the whole of making true and that a truthmaker must be that which its truth is about. This section presents four more arguments for those same two conclusions. But this section’s arguments, unlike those of the previous section, have nothing to do with necessary truths. So even those truthmaker theorists who misguidedly exempt necessary truths from Truthmaker’s demands should still endorse the two main conclusions of the previous section.

Barry Smith denies that necessitation is the making true relation. But his denial has nothing to do with necessary truths. Smith says: ‘There are malignant necessitators. Suppose God wills that John kiss Mary now. God’s willing act thereby necessitates the truth of “John is kissing Mary”. (For Malebranche, all necessitation is of this sort.) But God’s act is not a truthmaker for this judgment’ (Smith 1999: 278). Suppose God’s
willing really does necessitate that John is kissing Mary. Nevertheless, that willing is not a truthmaker for that John is kissing Mary. Therefore it is false that making true is nothing more than necessitation.

That John is kissing Mary is about John’s kissing, but not about God’s willing. This is the reason, I say, that God’s willing does not make that John is kissing Mary true. Smith draws the same conclusion, saying that ‘A truthmaker for a given judgment must be [that] which the judgment is about, must satisfy some relevance constraint’ (1999: 279).

We could come up with many relevantly similar examples involving God’s willing (or believing). These examples give us this section’s first reason for concluding that the relation of making true is more than mere necessitation. And generalizing from these examples gives us its first reason for concluding that a truth must be about its truthmaker.

A ‘world-bound’ individual exists in only one possible world. An actual world-bound individual exists in only the actual world. So an actual world-bound individual exists in only those worlds (i.e., the actual world) in which every (actual) truth is true. Thus any such individual necessitates every truth. If making true were just necessitation, then every (actual) world-bound individual would be a truthmaker for every truth. But, as Lewis (2001: 604) rightly says of this result: ‘That will never do—truthmaking was not meant to be so easy.’ This implies that making true is not just necessitation.

And suppose there actually is a world-bound individual. Suppose it is a certain electron. That a human exists is necessitated by that electron. But it is not in any way about that electron, which explains why that electron is not its truthmaker. On the other hand, that a world-bound individual exists is not only necessitated by, but is also about, that electron. This explains why that electron is a truthmaker for that a world-bound individual exists. Generalizing from this case, we get our second reason for concluding not only that making true
is more than necessitation, but also that truths are about their truthmakers.

Truthmaker theorists often say that a truthmaker explains that which it makes true:

Truthmaker theory is a theory of the groundedness of truth-values. Minimally, such a theory should enable one to identify whatever it is that explains why the truth-bearers have the truth-values they have. (Molnar 2000: 82)

[Truthmakers] are entities whose entire raison d’être is to explain what makes a linguistic item true. (Bigelow 1988: 121)

*That a human exists* is true because I (among others) exist. And so, in some sense of ‘explain’, I myself explain the truth of *that a human exists*. Contrast this with the state of affairs of Fido’s having the property of being such that a human exists. *That a human exists* is not true because that state of affairs involving Fido exists. So that state does not explain the truth of *that a human exists*. Assuming truthmaking involves explanation, that state is not a truthmaker for *that a human exists*. But that state necessitates *that a human exists*. So necessitation is not sufficient for making true.

Moreover, that truthmaking involves explanation suggests that a truth must be about its truthmaker. For my explaining the truth of *that a human exists* seems to imply that that truth is about me. And it seems that the state of Fido’s being such that a human exists fails to explain the truth of *that a human exists* because that truth is not about that state. In fact, I suspect that the idea that a truth must be explained by its truthmaker just is the idea that a truth must be appropriately about its truthmaker. And so we have our third reason.

Suppose that if a proposition is true, that proposition has the property of being true. Add to this Truthmaker’s commitment to states of affairs (§I). Then we can conclude that, for any proposition *p*, if *p* is true, then there is the state of affairs of *p*’s
being true. Necessarily, if the state of p’s being true exists, then p is true. This shows that necessitation is not sufficient for truthmaking. For it is false that, for all p, the state of p’s being true is a truthmaker for p.

It had better be false. Recall:

(2) If Queen Elizabeth II had been born in seventeenth-century Japan, she would have been a samurai warrior.

(2)’s truthmaker, some might say, is the state of affairs of (2)’s being true. Assuming that there are such states of affairs, a ‘truthmaker’ along these lines exists for any true claim whatsoever. If such ‘truthmakers’ were acceptable, then the objection that a claim lacks a truthmaker would presuppose that that claim was not true. But, presumably, it is possible for Truthmaker to catch cheaters without begging the question in this way. So it is false that for all p, the state of p’s being true is a truthmaker for p. This is a fourth reason to say that necessitation is not the whole of making true.

This fourth reason to say that necessitation is not the whole of making true points toward our fourth reason to say that truths are about their truthmakers. Consider that for some (though not for every) proposition p, p’s being true is a truthmaker for p. For example:

(3) There is at least one true proposition.

For each true proposition, that proposition’s being true is a truthmaker for (3). (Compare: each brown dog’s being brown is a truthmaker for that there is at least one brown dog.) So (3)’s being true is a truthmaker for (3).

This assumes that if this state exists, it has p and being true as essential constituents. The above example involving the state of affairs of Fido’s having the property of being such that a human exists makes a similar assumption. Truthmaker theorists should grant these assumptions, given Truthmaker’s commitments regarding the essential constituents of states of affairs (§I).
Truthmakers

(3)’s being true is a truthmaker for (3). But surely (2)’s being true is not a truthmaker for (2), the claim about Her Royal Highness’s counterfactual career. This difference between (2) and (3) can be explained as follows. (3) is about each proposition’s being true and, therefore, is about (3)’s being true. (2) is not about (2)’s being true. This explanation of this difference between (2) and (3) supports the idea that a truth must be about its truthmaker.

Truthmaker says that, for each truth, there exists something that is its truthmaker. The last two sections have shown that a truth must be about its truthmaker. So Truthmaker implies that, for each truth, there exists something that that truth is about. This implication is more substantive than it might appear. For it might appear to follow from the following two claims. First, grasping or understanding a proposition involves knowing what that proposition is about; and so, obviously, every proposition (and so every truth) that can be grasped is about something; and so, let us grant, every proposition (and so every truth) is about something. Second, if a truth is about something, then there exists something that that truth is about. From these two claims it follows, so it might appear, that for any truth, there exists something that that truth is about.

But this reasoning is flawed. Consider a ghost story. That story, naturally enough, is about ghosts. If I did not know that it was about ghosts, I would not understand that story. But none of this implies that there are some things—namely, ghosts—that are such that that story is about them. Instead, that story’s being ‘about ghosts’ implies only something regarding the nature of the story.

Similarly, the obvious way in which every proposition (and so every truth) is ‘about something’ is not a matter of there being

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8 Perhaps all propositions can be grasped. Or perhaps all graspable propositions’ being ‘about something’ is inductive evidence that all propositions, even the ungraspable ones, are about something.
something that that proposition is about. After all, to know what a proposition is ‘about’ in this sense is not to know of some object or state of affairs to which that proposition is related by an aboutness relation. Rather, it is to understand or grasp that proposition.

So we should not conflate Truthmaker’s claim that, for every truth, there exists something or other that that truth is about with the fairly obvious and innocuous claim that every truth is ‘about something’. Unlike this fairly obvious and innocuous claim, Truthmaker is asserting that there is an aboutness relation and that, for each true \( p \), there is some \( x \) such that \( p \) is thus related to \( x \).

One might understand a proposition perfectly and still not know what it is about, in the sense of ‘about’ that is central to Truthmaker. For example, one could understand that a human exists perfectly without knowing that you or I exist, even though, in Truthmaker’s sense of ‘about’, that a human exists is about each of its truthmakers, and so is about you and is also about me.

Our insight into Truthmaker’s aboutness relation comes from examples. For instance, as just noted, that a human exists is, in Truthmaker’s sense of ‘about’, about you and about me. Likewise, that Fido is brown is thus about the state of affairs of Fido’s being brown. And that John is kissing Mary is thus about John’s kissing Mary. Contrast these examples with the following. That a human exists is not thus about a world-bound individual (unless that world-bound individual happens to be human). FLT fails to be thus about your left thumb. And for many propositions \( p \), the state of \( p \)’s being true is not what \( p \) is about. Many other examples of entities that both necessitate a truth and are, moreover, what that truth is about can be found in this and the previous section. The same goes for examples of entities that necessitate a truth but are not what that truth is about.

I think that these examples give us an adequate grasp of the relevant aboutness relation. But I offer no analysis of that
relation. Nor do I have an absolutely decisive rebuttal for the sceptic who objects that, the above examples notwithstanding, we cannot really make sense of Truthmaker’s aboutness relation. On the contrary, I have a bit of sympathy for this objection. But no truthmaker theorist should. For to deny that we can make sense of the relevant aboutness relation is to deny that we can make sense of Truthmaker. This is because, as the above two sections should have made clear, Truthmaker requires a truth to be appropriately about its truthmaker.

In what follows, I shall give Truthmaker the benefit of the doubt. That is, I shall assume that we can make sense of Truthmaker’s aboutness relation. Moreover, in what follows, I shall upon occasion disqualify a wannabe truthmaker on the grounds that it fails to be what the relevant truth is thus about, even though it necessitates that truth. One might wonder whether I am right that the aspiring truthmaker is not—in the relevant sense of ‘about’—about that truth. To decide, we must consider whether the potential truthmaker is relevantly like the examples of necessitating entities that fail to be truthmakers discussed in this and the preceding section. These examples are our guide.

We should conclude that making true involves aboutness. But we should also stand by the previous chapter’s point that making true implies (conditional) necessitation. For even if there were nothing more to making true than a proposition’s being related to that which makes it true by aboutness, making true would still imply necessitation. This is because that to which a proposition stands in the aboutness relation thereby necessitates that proposition. At least, I lose my (admittedly somewhat shaky) grip on aboutness if I add that that which a truth is relevantly about need not (even conditionally) necessitate that truth. So I shall assume that Truthmaker implies not only that truths are about their respective truthmakers but also that truthmakers necessitate their respective truths.