2.2 Truthmakers for Negative Truths

2.2.1 Four Categories of Negative Truth

There are four categories of negative truths. Providing truthmakers for each of them has proven quite difficult. These categories are:

Four Categories of Negative Truth
1. Negative existentials – particulars; e.g., "There are no unicorns".
2. Negative existentials – properties; e.g., "The Danube River is not blue".
3. General truths; e.g., "All ravens are black".
4. Superlative truths; e.g., "Robert is the tallest person in the world".

2.2.2 Incompatibilities

Let us first examine category (2), negative existentials for properties. Presumably, there are no such things as negative properties; i.e., "The Danube is not blue" cannot be made true by the state of affairs, “the Danube’s having the property of non-blueness”. But, as Molnar points out, perhaps it is made true by some positive property of the Danube, and its incompatibility with blueness.¹ For instance, the fact that the Danube is grey (and grey is incompatible with blue) might be enough to ground such a truth.

This proposal is faced with a couple of problems, however: First, the incompatibility claim "being grey is not compatible with being blue" is itself a negative truth in need of a truthmaker. Furthermore, such incompatibilities often incorporate other negative truths covertly (for instance, incompatibilities regarding height).² Consider the proposition, "John is not seven feet tall", for instance. The state of affairs of John’s being six feet tall is said to be a suitable truthmaker for this negative proposition, since John’s being six feet tall is incompatible with his being seven feet tall. But, this is only if the property “being six feet tall” is really something like “being six feet tall and no taller.” So, we have not really explained away a negative property with a positive one. We have only explained a negative property with another negative property. To understand this mistake more clearly,

¹ Molnar (2000), 74.
² Armstrong (2004), 61, 74.
one need only consider that some quantitative properties do not smuggle in negative clauses covertly. For instance, <Sue has six dollars> is not incompatible with <Sue has seven dollars>, since “has six dollars” does not entail the additional negative clause, “and she has no more dollars.” In any case, even if that solution works, there are other type-(2) negative truths for which this solution does not seem to be available. For instance, what would be the truthmaker for <This liquid is colorless>? Furthermore, the other three categories of negative truth would still remain a problem.

2.2.3 Absences

Let us now consider type (3) negative truths; i.e., general truths. Imagine that there are exactly one billion ravens in the world and all of them are black. What is the truthmaker for the proposition <All ravens are black>? Intuitively, we might think that it is simply the set of one billion actual ravens which makes this proposition true. But, this cannot be the case, since we can imagine another scenario where exactly this set of one billion black ravens exists as well as one white raven. In that scenario, the proposition, <All ravens are black> would be false. So, if the set of actual ravens makes the proposition <All ravens are black> true, it does so only contingently. But, truthmaker theorists generally claim that, if a truthmaker makes some proposition true, it cannot fail to do so; i.e., for any X, if X makes P true, then necessarily, if X exists, P is true. Molnar very eloquently motivates this principle as follows:

If the very particulars whose actual existence make true the statement ‘There is no wine on the table’, could exist in some possible worlds and not make it true, in those worlds, that there is no wine on the table, then how could the existence of those particulars serve to explain the truth in the actual world of ‘There is no wine on the table’? Truthmaking is the relation that we invoke to explain why a statement is true by reference to the existence of something. Such explanations could not be given if the link between the explanans and the explanandum were a purely accidental relation. … [If that were the case], there could be two possible worlds that are identical in what they contain but in one of which p is true while in the other p is not true. This would altogether sever any connection between what exists in a world and the truths about that world, and would take us completely outside the framework of a broadly correspondence view of truth. Truthmaking is necessary or it is nothing.\(^3\)

\(^3\) Molnar (2000), 84.
What we need, then, is some truthmaker in addition to the set of one billion actual ravens, such that <All ravens are black> would not be true in the scenario where there is an additional white raven. Some have suggested absences as truthmakers for these sorts of truths. Thus, it might be the absence of non-black ravens that makes the proposition true. Similarly, regarding the other categories of negative truth, the absence of color in this liquid would make <This liquid is colorless> true; the absence of unicorns would make <There are no unicorns> true; and the absence of anyone taller than Robert would make <Robert is the tallest person in the world> true. Thus, we might say that negative truths are true in virtue of a lack of “falsemakers.” But, truthmaking is a relation, and it requires two relata. So, as Molnar points out, “If absences are to work for us as truthmakers, we have to take them ontologically seriously.” Since the truthmaking relation is between the truth-bearer and some portion of reality, absences would need to be portions of reality. A lack of something does not seem to be anything at all, however. As Cameron puts it,

Unless we reify this absence of a truthmaker this is nothing but metaphysical smoke and mirrors. It’s totally disingenuous to say that ~p is true in virtue of the absence of a truthmaker for p unless there is some thing that is this absence.

Dodd points out that accepting absences (or the lack of falsemakers) as truthmakers is to make the category mistake of “reifying absences.” For instance, if <This liquid is colorless> is made true by the absence of color in the liquid (or, alternatively, the state of affairs of the liquid’s being colorless), then it is either the case that absences are things or else there are negative properties (e.g., “colorlessness”). Both of these proposals are unacceptable.

2.2.4 Cambridge Properties

Presently, we are looking for that which makes <All ravens are black> true. Perhaps this truth can be grounded in Cambridge-type properties (i.e., relational, extrinsic properties which add

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4 See, for instance: Martin (1996).
5 Molnar (2000), 75.
6 Cameron (2008b), 412.
7 Dodd (2007), 386.
nothing to the objects which possess them). For example, perhaps I have—or all objects in the world have?—the property of “being in a world where there are one billion black ravens”, and this makes the above proposition true. But, I would still have this property in a world where there is one additional white raven. What we really need to establish, then, is that there are one billion black ravens, and there are no other ravens. The italicized clause is a closure clause—and the Cambridge-property response must be amended to account for closure clauses. We may attempt this amendment in one of two ways: First, we could suggest that I also lack some positive Cambridge property such as “being in a world with one billion and one ravens” or “being in a world where a non-black raven exists.” But, this suggestion will not do, since it re-introduces the problem of truthmakers for negative existentials about properties (for, a truthmaker is required for the fact that I lack these properties).

Alternatively, we might instead suggest that, in addition to having the property, “being in a world where there are one billion black ravens”, I also have some negative property, such as “being in a world where there are not any non-black ravens” or “being in a world where there are not one billion and one ravens”, etc. So, rather than lacking some positive properties, perhaps I possess some negative properties. But, this sort of negative property is dubious (as are Cambridge properties in general, but I am ignoring this for the moment). The philosopher who makes the present suggestion would have to accept these properties as basic; i.e., irreducible to simpler properties. This is very counter-intuitive. Furthermore, note that this strategy would multiply these bizarre properties infinitely (since I would also possess the properties, “Being in a world that lacks one billion and one ravens,” and “Being in a world that lacks one billion and two ravens,” and so on).\(^8\)

A third suggestion might be that the Cambridge property that I really have is “being in a world where there are one billion black ravens, and there are no other ravens”, or rather, “being in a world...”

\(^8\) Armstrong (2004), 55.
where there are *exactly* one billion black ravens*. In this way, we have built the *closure clause* into the property. This suggestion is undesirable for the same reasons as the previous. Yet, it is an indicator of what I believe to be the key to finding suitable truthmakers for negative truths—namely, that the closure clause must somehow be incorporated into some portion of reality. It is to this suggestion that I now turn.

### 2.3 Truthmakers for the Closure Clause

#### 2.3.1 The Need For Closure

We are still looking for that which makes *<All ravens are black>* true—a difficult task. Even if we had a truthmaker for the existence of *everything* in the world, the task would still not be completed. For instance, even if we had truthmakers for *<X₁ … Xₙ are black ravens>*,* <Y is a leafy oak tree>*,* <Z is a striped zebra>*,* and so on—for *everything* that exists—we would also require a truthmaker for *<And there is nothing else that exists>*. It is this last truth that is the crux of the problem. It is what I have called the closure clause; the “that’s all folks!” clause, if you will.

Many philosophers have inferred from this difficulty that closure clauses must invoke *primitives* in some way. I agree. Note that this is *not* to claim that the primitives grounding closure clauses are primitive *truths*—i.e., truths having no truthmakers—for that view is the denial of truthmaker maximalism. To preserve maximalism, it cannot be the *truth* which is primitive. Rather, it must be some other (non-truth-bearing) entity; the idea is that perhaps the closure *itself* is the primitive.

The idea that closure is fundamental in some way is intuitive (or, if you prefer, total-ness, complete-ness, all-ness, etc.). For instance, when I say, “All of the people in this room are philosophers,” I establish the truth of this claim in the following way: I examine each and every person in the room and confirm of them, “philosopher.” But, my conclusion about “*all*” of the people in the room is possible only because *in advance* I have acknowledged a certain *boundary or limit* to the number of people in the room. When I take my survey of the people in the room, it is already
assumed that this set, of say 10 people, constitutes the whole set—i.e., the domain—of all and only the people in this room. I stipulate the domain of objects. But, this “all-ness” cannot ultimately be grounded in my stipulation. It seems to be objectively true, independent of any stipulation, that there are exactly 10 people in the room. This limit or all-ness seems to be in place—it is already established—before I survey the room. So, what grounds it? That is, what makes it true that <These are all of the people in this room>? The answer seems to be that, somehow, the all-ness or totality is already a part of the world.

A brief word regarding the proposal for possible worlds as truthmakers: If possible worlds are maximal sets of propositions, each with truth values, then (let’s assume) the abstract world that is instantiated (i.e., is actual) is W, and in W, <All ravens are black> is true. Now, one might be tempted to propose that, since that is the possible world which is instantiated, then of course <All ravens are black> is true at the actual world. This is confused, however. It is not as if, among the ersatz worlds, one of them has a little tag on it which says, “This one represents the actual world”—and this concrete, actual world is the way that it is because of this tag. The fact about which of the possible worlds is instantiated is grounded here, in the concrete actual world. In short, the truth of the matter concerning which world is instantiated is true in virtue of the concrete world, not vice versa. What the world is like does not depend upon which maximal set of propositions are true. Rather, which maximal set of propositions are true depends upon what the world is like. That is the central tenet of truthmaker theory! So, while, <If world W is actual, then proposition <All ravens are black> is

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9 Yet, could this truth have something to do with observers? For instance, one might suggest that the all-ness has something to do with counterfactuals regarding observers (e.g., something like, “(1) If a normal observer were to look into the room with 11 people, they would see 11 people. (2) I do not see 11 people; rather, I see 10 people. (3) Therefore the room does not have 11 people.”). Yet, we would still require a truthmaker for premise (1); for, “and they would not see 10 people, or 12 people, etc.” is implied by that premise. We are back to negative truths.
true> is true, we still require a truthmaker for the antecedent. Appealing to worlds as truthmakers here would be to get things backwards.\(^\text{10}\)

Therefore, since truths depend on what there is \textit{in the world}, let us take inventory of what types of things exist in the world. Plausibly, as far as the concrete world is concerned, there exist objects, properties, and concrete states of affairs (i.e., some relational combination of objects and properties). So, it seems that these three items compose the complete list of candidates for primitive all-ness. It comes as no surprise, then, that the three leading proposed truthmakers for negative truths are (1) Wholes as objects,\(^\text{11}\) (2) Wholeness properties,\(^\text{12}\) and (3) Totality states of affairs.\(^\text{13}\) I will now examine each of these proposals in turn. I will not take a stand here on which of these three accounts is the preferred account, but I \textit{will} conclude that something like one of these must be the case.

\textit{2.3.2 Objects}

We might think that “wholes” exist as something more fundamental than their parts. If these wholes are fundamental entities, then the closure clause can easily be accounted for. But, it seems strange to propose that there are “wholes” that are proper parts of the world—for instance, a fundamental “whole” composed of all and only the actual set of one billion ravens. Jonathan Schaffer proposes that the fundamental entity is the entire world. It is less strange to think that there is an object which we call “the world”, and that this object is fundamentally “whole”. On that view, there is only one truthmaker; i.e., the fundament which is the whole world.

\(^{10}\) I will return to this thought in chapter 3. It is, I think, the primary intuition behind my rejection of possible worlds as modal truthmakers.

\(^{11}\) Jonathan Schaffer (2009).

\(^{12}\) Cameron (2008b).

\(^{13}\) Armstrong (2004).
This view has been criticized primarily for two reasons: First, it does not give us what Armstrong calls “minimal” or “relevant” truthmakers.\footnote{Ibid., §2.10.} It is counter-intuitive to suggest that the object which makes <There is coffee on the table> true is the same object which makes <There are no unicorns> true. As Merricks suggests,\footnote{Merricks (2007), 26.} the truthmaker for a proposition must be (in some appropriate sense) the thing that the proposition is about.

To Armstrong, we might reply that, while the fact that the world is a whole might be the only truthmaker for <There are no unicorns>, the world need not be the only truthmaker for <There is coffee on the table>. The state of affairs of the coffee’s being on the table also makes it true. So, there is still a relevant truthmaker for the latter proposition. Of course, all negative truths will still have one, and only one, truthmaker on Schaffer’s proposal—namely, the world. For instance, <There are no unicorns> and <All ravens are black> would both be made true by the world as a whole. But, this is not really so strange when we consider the fact that each of these propositions do in fact incorporate an implicit assumption about the entire world. For instance, the former proposition claims that there are no unicorns in the entire world, while the latter claims that all of the ravens in the entire world are black. So, perhaps it is not implausible that something world-sized really is the minimal truthmaker for such truths.

To Merricks, we might reply that his criterion is too strong. Perhaps a proposition’s truthmaker need only involve the thing(s) that a proposition is about—in which case, we may point out that the world does involve the table and the coffee, and furthermore any claim about what does not exist in the world (e.g., unicorns) is, in some appropriate sense, a claim about the world. Furthermore, Merricks’ requirement that truths always be about their truthmakers is not even obvious. It seems that we must distinguish between an epistemic truthmaker (i.e., the thing(s) or evidence by which we come to believe or know that some proposition is true) and a metaphysical truthmaker (i.e., the thing(s)
in the world that make some proposition true). The world does seem to be an appropriate metaphysical truthmaker for both propositions, even though it is not an appropriate epistemic one; namely, since we come to know (or think we know) the truth of those propositions without surveying the entire world.

The second criticism is that Schaffer’s view is derived only by accepting priority monism—the view that the whole which is the world is fundamental and ontologically prior to all of its parts. Schaffer is quick to point out, however, that this view is not as bizarre as one might think.16 Those who think it strange are likely confusing his proposal of priority monism with existence monism. The latter is the view that there is only one object. Priority monism, however, acknowledges that parts of the world like people, tables, and chairs are objects that do exist. Schaffer’s claim is simply that those things are not ontologically fundamental; and this is a much weaker claim than that made by existence monism.

2.3.3 Properties

Ross Cameron proposes that the world has the property of being worldly essentially.17 In other words, the world is essentially all there is. On this account, we can easily account for the closure clause, in virtually the same way as Schaffer’s view that the world is a fundamental whole. There are two worries regarding this solution: First, what is the truthmaker for <The world has the property of being all there is>? As Merricks points out, it seems that “it is because there is nothing more that the universe has the property of being such that there is nothing more in the universe, if it really does have that property.”18 But, if that is the case, then Cameron’s account begs the question, since it posits the very truth that is meant to be established in order to establish itself. In response, Cameron might simply suggest that, whenever there is a collection such that that collection is all there is, it is just a brute

16 Schaffer (2009), 323.
17 Cameron (2008a), 295.
metaphysical fact that the collection possesses the basic property of being all there is (however strange this might seem).

Another worry is that, since the actual world is essentially worldly, then it is metaphysically impossible for there to have been one additional object in it. There could not have been even one more proton. Consider: If there were one additional proton, then the object that is the actual world would be a proper part of the world that contains everything in the actual world plus one additional proton. But, since the actual world is essentially worldly, it cannot be a proper part of a larger world. How could it? It has essentially the property of being all there is, which by definition rules out the possibility of there being anything more. Cameron dissolves this counter-intuitive outcome, however, by distinguishing between what he calls de re and de dicto metaphysical possibility. While it is true that a world containing everything actual plus one proton is not a de re metaphysical possibility—i.e., it is not a way that the object which we call the actual world could have been—that world (or, at least, a qualitative duplicate of it) is a de dicto metaphysical possibility; i.e., it is a way that a world could be. So the world with the additional proton is metaphysically possible (in the de dicto sense of possibility).

I am sympathetic to this idea that there is a difference between de re metaphysical possibility and de dicto metaphysical possibility. However, in chapter 6 I will argue that only the former (de re possibility) constitutes metaphysical possibility, while the latter (de dicto possibility) constitutes logical possibility. So, ultimately, I will reject Cameron’s proposal, since I conclude that all of the metaphysical possibilities must be what Cameron calls de re metaphysical possibilities—and yet, I wish to allow for the metaphysical possibility that the world could contain one additional proton.

2.3.4 States of Affairs

Armstrong proposes that there are what he calls “totality states of affairs”. These are derived by introducing a totality relation (the “Tot” relation, as he calls it), which holds between certain objects
and certain properties.\footnote{Armstrong (2004), §6.2.} This yields truthmakers for negative truths. For instance, <All ravens are black> is true because the set of one billion black ravens stands in the totality relation to the property of “being a raven”. In other words, the sum of those one billion individuals “totals” the property of “being a raven”. Furthermore, each of those one billion individuals is black. This view may seem undesirable, however, since it posits a new type of relation between objects and properties. We are quite familiar with the idea that objects instantiate properties (a raven instantiates blackness, for instance), but to say that a sum of entities totals some property is to introduce an entirely new category of object-property relation—and this is unparsimonious.

More worrisome may be the fact that totality states of affairs are incredibly fragile.\footnote{Merricks (2007), 62-63.} For, if anything were changed in the world—say, the subtraction of one single electron in a distant galaxy—there would be a different totality fact about the world, and therefore a different object as truthmaker for certain negative truths. But, is this really so counter-intuitive? Consider the table I am sitting at. If I strip a single electron from it, in one sense (functionally) it is still the same table; but in another sense (materially), it is not the same table. Materially, then, all material objects are incredibly fragile—and totality states are no exception. They seem to be fragile only in something like this latter (mereological) sense.

### 2.3.5 Conclusion

All three of the above proposals do seem suspect in some way—as if each of the proposals is somehow cheating. For instance, it may seem as if Armstrong’s claim is simply that <All ravens are black> is made true by the state of affairs of all the ravens being black, and this does not seem to be much of an explanation. This is not Armstrong’s claim, however. His actual claim is that the set of all black ravens “totals” the property of being a raven—and this totality state of affairs is the truthmaker. Still, this might just seem like a more complicated way of cheating—and the same goes for
the other two proposals. But, allow me to offer some motivation for the conclusion that one of these three views is correct:

I stated above that truthmaker theorists endorse that view called truthmaker necessitarianism, which states: If X is a truthmaker for P, then necessarily, if X exists, then P is true. Now, consider two possible worlds, w₁ and w₂. David Lewis points out that, if truthmaker necessitarianism is true, then w₁ cannot differ from w₂ merely because w₂ has one thing in its domain that w₁ does not.²¹ Rather, on truthmaker necessitarianism, both worlds must have something in their domain that the other does not—otherwise everything that is true in w₁ would also be true in w₂. Justification: If w₂ merely contained everything from w₁ plus one object, then w₁ would be a proper part of w₂. But, w₁ necessitates all of the truths that it makes true, whenever it exists. In that case, everything that is true in w₁ would be true in w₂. This cannot be the case, however. Since w₂ has one object that w₁ does not, it is not the case that everything that is true in w₁ is also true in w₂ (for instance, if the additional object in w₂ were a unicorn, and there are no unicorns in w₁, then <There are no unicorns> would nevertheless still be true in w₂—a mistaken result).

Lewis takes this as evidence that we should reject truthmaker necessitarianism in favor of a weaker view called “Truth Supervenes on Being” (TSB). Rather than reject truthmaker necessitarianism, I suggest, however that we interpret Lewis’s observation as an exciting discovery which instead supports that thesis: Whenever two worlds differ, they must both have something in their domain that the other does not. But, this is exactly the conclusion which theories such as Schaffer’s, Cameron’s, and Armstrong’s deliver. For, on all three of those views, it is metaphysically impossible for w₁ to be a proper part of another world. I have already discussed this result with regard to Cameron’s proposal. Now consider Armstrong’s view: If w₁ were (per impossibile) a proper part of some other world, an incompatibility would occur. For, one of the members of the domain of w₁ is

²¹ Lewis (2001).
a particular totality fact. But, as Merricks noted, totality facts are *fragile*, such that, in order to be a proper part of some other world, \( w_1 \) would first have to be stripped of its totality fact, and the world which \( w_1 \) is a proper part of would have some *other* totality fact instead. Similarly, it should be obvious that, on Schaffer’s view, something that is fundamentally a whole cannot be a proper part of something else.

But, then, on all three views it is metaphysically impossible for the entire domain of \( w_1 \) to be a proper subset of the domain of another world. Lewis takes this as a reason to reject truthmaker necessitarianism. But, why is this outcome a strike against that view? Perhaps the fact that there is a strong intuition that you could take a world and add *just one electron and nothing else* is what drives Lewis to his conclusion here. But, note that, in a sense the necessitarian view *does* permit this. The necessitarian is happy to accept the conclusion that two possible worlds could be *qualitatively* identical, except for the difference of one electron. In that sense, two possible worlds *can* differ (qualitatively) by only one electron. But, in another sense, they *cannot* differ (ontologically) by only one electron (since, e.g., they must also have different totality facts). But, this does not seem so bizarre to me. It is very much like the claim that, while in one sense, removing one electron from a table is merely a change with a difference of one electron, in another sense it is *also* a change with a difference of *sets*, e.g., from the set \( \{X\} \) to the set \( \{X-1\} \). Rather than disproving truthmaker necessitarianism, then, we might instead take Lewis as giving a demonstration that closure is necessarily a *part of* each world, and ought to be included in our ontology.

### 2.4 Primitive Closure Versus Primitive Truth

For those who remain unconvinced, perhaps truthmaker maximalism will seem more appealing when we compare it with the alternative. While truthmaker maximalists are criticized for introducing a dubious primitive entity in order to solve the problem of truthmakers for negative truths (i.e., fundamental wholes as objects, basic wholeness properties, or totality as a primitive relation), the
opponent of maximalism has a primitive which is far more unpalatable: Namely, truth.22 Perhaps it is a matter of taste regarding which primitive is preferable. But, for comparison, note the following regarding these two options:

1. Non-Maximalism Arbitrarily Divides Truth Into Two Categories – It seems undeniable that some truths have truthmakers. For instance, <Sparky exists> is made true by Sparky, the concrete object. A non-maximalist, then, must accept that some truths are grounded, while others are not. The non-maximalist typically rejects truthmakers for negative truths and modal truths. In that case, propositions such as <All ravens are black> and <I could have been a truck driver> have no truthmaker. Those propositions just primitively have the property of being true; i.e., their truth is not grounded. But, this is a bizarre claim. How could it be the case that some truths are grounded while others are not? As Cameron points out, “Either there’s something wrong with accepting truths that don’t have an ontological grounding or there isn’t: if there is, then every truth requires a grounding; if there isn’t, then no truth requires a grounding.”23 The only reason that the non-maximalist seems to have for thinking that negative truths and necessary truths have no truthmakers is that it is really difficult to come up with satisfying truthmakers for them. But, that is not a very good reason to reject maximalism. Non-maximalism therefore draws an arbitrary line between grounded and un-grounded truths without providing any compelling justification for the distinction between these two sorts of truths. Maximalism, on the other hand, makes no such distinction. No truth is an exception to the rule. Rather, all truths are grounded. All truths are true for some reason. The latter, I believe, is by far the more plausible position.

2. Ungrounded truths allow for a disconnect between truth and reality – To claim, as the non-maximalist does, that <All of the people in this room are philosophers> has no truthmaker (since it is a general

22 Note that this claim applies only to those who either take all truths as primitive, or to those truthmaker theorists who are not maximalists (and therefore take only some truths as primitives). It does not, however, apply to that theory, related to truthmaker maximalism, called Truth Supervenes on Being (TSB).

23 Cameron (2008b), 412.
truth) is to say that there is nothing in the world that makes it true. The proposition is simply primitively true. Admitting this, however, is to admit a disconnect between truth and reality. But, if there were such a disconnect between truth and reality, then it would be conceivable that the proposition above could come out true even when the room is full of accountants, or truck drivers, or (worse still) Derrida scholars. But, that is ridiculous. Clearly, the proposition can only come out true when the room is full of philosophers. The truthmaker maximalist has no such problem. On that view, all truths are grounded in reality, such that if reality changes, then so does the set of things that are true.

What I have just stated is a metaphysical problem. But, there is also an epistemological problem for the view that some truths are ungrounded. For, if that were the case, then it would be impossible even in principle to discover what is true. If a primitive truth is disconnected from reality, then empirical discovery is a hopeless endeavor. For, we could never observe anything in reality that would give us knowledge of it. I could be observing a room containing ten accountants, for instance, and for all I know it is true that the room is full of philosophers. This is an incredibly undesirable outcome.

3. Primitive totality relations are not really that bizarre – Maximalism is accused of introducing suspicious primitives, but such a move is not as strange as its opponents make it out to be. Recall the stipulation made regarding the room full of ten philosophers. It seemed intuitive to assume the existence of a cap or limit to the number of people in the room prior to assessing the truth of the proposition, <All of the people in this room are philosophers>. That is, the domain of the room is set in advance, such that one implicitly assumes, “I am talking about all and only the ten people in this room,” and then assesses which propositions are consistent with this. The totality seems to be a given, prior to the truth of the proposition, rather than the other way around. One does not stipulate the truth, <All of the people in this room are philosophers> and then assess whether or not reality conforms to this truth. It seems, rather, that totalities are somehow already in the world, prior to the
truths about them—and the view which places some form of totality as a primitive in its ontology is the only view that accurately achieves the direction of fit from world to truth. To posit truth as a primitive, prior to or independent of totality, is backwards.

4. The choice between primitives is nearly identical—Since it is undesirable to have more primitive truths than is necessary, I would encourage the proponent of them to take only one truth as a primitive: Namely, something like, $<A_1, A_2, \ldots, A_n>$ are all the things that exist, a totality proposition. Consider the proposition, $<$There are no unicorns$>$. The primitivist may be able to avoid the assumption that this proposition is primitively true. For instance, its truthmaker may be something like the sum of the truthmakers for $<A_1$ exists and is not a unicorn$>$, $<A_2$ exists and is not a unicorn$>$, etc. (via their incompatibilities with the property of being a unicorn, for instance) and the truthmaker for the totality proposition that I just gave. Of course, $<$There are no unicorns$>$ will still be ultimately ungrounded, since that totality proposition lacks a truthmaker. Yet, $<$There are no unicorns$>$ would be at least partially grounded. However unattractive the primitivist will find the suggestion I have just made, my aim here is only to point out how small the difference between maximalism and primitivism really is; for, if they wanted to, the primitivist could get by with only one primitive truth (i.e., the totality proposition). But, the maximalist can get by with only one brute fact (i.e., the totality fact). But, these primitives are nearly identical. Why then be so reluctant to embrace totality as a primitive? If the choice is between one primitive and another, it seems that a primitive totality is preferable to a primitive truth, since, as we have seen, doing so does not arbitrarily divide truths into two categories, nor does it create a disconnect between truth and reality.

If the reader is still unconvinced by the above, then there is one last line of defense that the truthmaker maximalist may offer. Namely, the following: “What that truthmaker is [for negative

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24 For instance, Trenton Merricks seems to have the opposite intuition as I do, writing that “a primitive (and monadic and non-intrinsic) being true is preferable to primitive (and monadic and non-intrinsic) properties like being such that there is nothing more in the universe.” [(2007), 187]
Call this position “sad truthmaker maximalism”, after the following excerpt from Molnar: “We need positive truthmakers for negative truths but we have no good theory of what these might be. This is the sad conclusion…” Sad truthmaker maximalism may be ultimately unsatisfying, but it is nevertheless coherent to claim (just as many scientists do about several of their hypotheses) that, while we do not presently have any conclusive evidence for the truthmakers in question, we hold out hope for some future proposal which confirms their existence.

REFERENCES


