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## ***For Keeping Truth In Truthmaking***

Fraser MacBride

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### *1. Introduction*

Armstrong has long campaigned to persuade us of the veracity of the truthmaker principle that every truth has a truthmaker. He has announced the principle as ‘a development of the correspondence theory of truth’: it’s what you get when you start out from the natural idea that truths are true if and only if they correspond to something real and then free yourself from the confining assumption that the correspondence relation need be one-one (1997: 128-31, 2004: 16-17, 2010: 62). Armstrong has also maintained the view that a truthmaker for a truth must necessitate that truth (1997: 115-6, 2004: 5-7, 2010: 65). This is why Armstrong has adhered to a version of the truthmaker principle according to which for every truth there exists something such that the existence of that thing necessitates the truth in question.

Should we follow Armstrong in identifying the truthmaker principle with a development of the correspondence theory? Several philosophers, influenced by the deflationary idea that the truth predicate is merely a device of generalization, have rejected this identification. Lewis, in particular, has argued that the truthmaker principle hasn’t anything to do with correspondence; it isn’t even concerned with truth (2001: 278-9). But his arguments shouldn’t be taken as decisive and it’s significant that they’re not. We shouldn’t recognise the ‘cat’ in ‘cattle’ as significant but we should acknowledge the ‘truth’ in ‘truthmaking’.

### *2. Is the truthmaker principle a development of the correspondence theory?*

Lewis argues the truthmaker principle hasn’t anything to do with correspondence, and so doesn’t deserve to be called a correspondence theory, on the grounds that some truthmakers don’t correspond to the truths they make true.<sup>1</sup> Only facts,

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<sup>1</sup> Of course Lewis doesn’t himself endorse the truthmaker principle in anything like the sense that Armstrong *et al* endorse it. See MacBride 2005 and 2013: 2.4.

Lewis tells us, can intelligibly be said to correspond to truths -- presumably because only items that share a structure are capable of corresponding to one another, and it is only facts that are capable of sharing a structure with a truth. But if we admit facts we must also recognize the constituents of facts, things and properties. Each of them is a truthmaker for the truth that there exists at least one non-fact. Since the truthmakers that aren't facts don't correspond to the truths they make true, Lewis concludes that what it means to be a truthmaker can't come down to corresponding to anything.

But this argument of Lewis's doesn't establish that it's wrong to conceive of the truthmaker principle as Armstrong does. The correspondence theory isn't just an expression of the very specific idea that we can describe the relation between truths and what they represent in terms of correspondence. The correspondence theory is also an expression of the very general idea that truth is a relation between something that's representational, a truth, and something out there in the world that isn't (except where it describes another representation). It is because these ideas are different that it's possible to reconcile abandoning the correspondence theory with remaining realist *au fond* -- with remaining committed to the existence of something outside of the circle of our representations upon which their truth or falsehood depends. And it's because these ideas are different that we can continue to hold to the general idea that truth is a relation to something worldly -- regardless of whether the worldly relatum is a fact or a non-fact -- even if we give up the specific idea that truth consists in correspondence.

This, then, is the sense in which, *pace* Lewis, the truthmaker principle may be seen as a development of the correspondence theory. The truthmaker principle is an expression of the general idea that truth is a relation to something worldly, an idea of which all the different variations of the correspondence theory are determinations, an idea that's always been a key motivation for adopting the correspondence theory. Witness Russell's *apologia* for the correspondence theory in *Problems of Philosophy* (1912: 70). The unalloyed truthmaker principle

is what remains once the specific determinations of the correspondence theory have been given up.

### 3. *Is the truthmaker principle a theory of truth?*

It's because the correspondence theory, and *a fortiori* the truthmaker principle, embody the idea that truth is a relation to something worldly that they are *prima facie* rivals to other theories of truth. The redundancy theory denies truth to be any kind of relation whatsoever; coherence theories conceive of truth to be a different kind of relation altogether, consisting in a relation between a truth and a coherent system of other representations. But Lewis also argues that the truthmaker principle isn't about truth and so doesn't even qualify as a theory of truth. If he's right then the truthmaker principle can hardly differ from *bona fide* theories of truth with respect to whether truth is, or isn't, a genuine relation. Is he?

Lewis invites us to consider the following instance of the truthmaker principle:

(1) It's true that cats purr iff there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies that cats purr.

Given the redundancy bi-conditional,

(2) It's true that cats purr iff cats purr,

this is equivalent to

(3) Cats purr iff there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies that cats purr.

But (3) can't be about truth, Lewis surmises, because it doesn't mention truth. So what is (3) about? Lewis's answer: 'the existential grounding of the purring of

cats' (2001: 279). Similarly all other instances of the truthmaker principle are equivalent, given the relevant redundancy biconditionals, to biconditionals that aren't about truth either. They're about the existential groundings of pigs flying, donkeys talking and so on ad infinitum. What this shows is that the truthmaker principle is equivalent, given the redundancy biconditionals, to an infinite bundle of biconditionals about all manner of things, but not particularly about truth. Lewis concludes that the truthmaker principle isn't particularly about truth either and therefore shouldn't be called a 'theory of truth'. Why then does truth get a mention in the truthmaker principle? Only, Lewis tells us, 'for the sake of making a long story short'. Mentioning truth enables us to abbreviate this infinite bundle of claims -- about the existential groundings of cats purring, pigs flying, donkeys talking etc. -- by one concise slogan.

#### 4. *Are the instances of the truthmaker principle credible eo ipso?*

Lewis' argument that the truthmaker principle isn't a rival to other *bona fide* theories of truth, because it isn't even about truth, presupposes that the only role that truth performs in the truthmaker principle is that of enabling us to formulate a generalisation that makes a long story short. But is Lewis within his rights to presuppose this?

If truth figures in the truthmaker principle just to make a long story short then the truthmaker principle can't be any more plausible than the long story it shortens. But the instances of the truthmaker principle aren't themselves credible conceived *eo ipso*; so if the truthmaker principle is just a short version of the long story about them then it can't be plausible either. What makes the instances credible for us is that we derive them from the truthmaker principle rather than the other way around. We believe all the instances, if we do, only because we already believe the truthmaker principle itself, or something equivalent in strength. How could this be the case if the truthmaker principle is only an abbreviation of its instances? <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vision (2003) seeks to undermine Lewis's argument in a different manner. He points out that the links Lewis exploits to provide a deflationary argument, from

Consider (3). Pull down the veil of ignorance; try to forget about truth for the while. What evidence have we remaining for thinking that just because cats do something, *viz.* purr, there is something else whose existence necessitates their doing so? Why suppose that there is some additional thing, that isn't a cat, which guarantees their purring? Aren't cats just doing it for themselves? Don't biconditionals like (3) just lack credibility conceived *eo ipso*?

The choice of examples makes this less plain than it might be. We have biological evidence aplenty that there are antecedent physical conditions *causally* responsible for the purring of cats. But this doesn't lend any credibility to (3) because biology doesn't tell us that there is anything the existence of which *implies* that cats purr. We can screen out the spurious credibility that's easily attributed to (3) if we switch our attention to things' being thus-and-so that may have no physical antecedents. Take, for example, biconditionals like (3) except that they concern the posits of fundamental physics' being thus-and-so, *e.g.* the size of the gravitational constant or the initial state of the universe after the Big Bang. Whilst there is some speculative work in modern physics that continues to hazard explanations for these posits' being thus-and-so, it's far from obvious that there is anything else the existence of which explains their being thus-and so. It remains perfectly tenable that there is no serious explanation of several, perhaps many, of these posits of fundamental physics' being thus-and-so. But it's not obvious either that if there are no physical antecedents for the posits of fundamental physics' being thus-and-so then there is something else the existence of which implies their being thus-and-so. It isn't obvious that the posits of fundamental physics can't be thus-and-so without being necessitated by the

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(1) and (2) to (3), may equally be used to construct an inflationary argument, from (3) and (2) to (1), that draws as its conclusion that truths imply, and are implied by, the existence of things. There are only grounds for favouring the deflationary argument if (2), the redundancy biconditional, is construed as *reducing* a claim about truth to a claim that isn't. But (2) doesn't itself assign priority to its right-hand-side over its left-hand-side. (2) only says that they're equivalent. It's only the redundancy theory of truth that assigns the right side of (2) priority over its left-hand-side. So Vision concludes that Lewis isn't entitled to this reading of (2) when articulating the correspondence theory.

existence of anything else. Why shouldn't they just be thus-and-so -- without benefit of outside supports they don't appear to need?

It may be replied that there is something we've overlooked that obviously necessitates these things' being thus-and-so, namely the fact that they're thus-and-so. But what kind of guarantee do we have, why should we believe, that if it's the case that things are thus-and-so there is a fact the existence of which implies their being thus-and-so? Quite what the difficulties are depends upon what we conceive of facts to be.

If we conceive of facts as Frege did, as nothing but true propositions, then of course there will be a fact that things are thus-and-so if things are thus-and-so. But remember we're not supposed to be talking about truth or true things from behind the veil of ignorance -- except as means for making long stories short. What's more, because facts, on this way of thinking, just are true propositions, they're ill suited to serve as the existential grounds of things being thus-and-so. Consider the true proposition that cats purr. Because it's contingent, it must be possible for it to be false as well as true. So it must be possible for this proposition to exist even if (alas) cats don't purr, *i.e.* possible for it to exist when it's false. But if the true proposition that cats purr can exist even if cats don't purr, its existence can hardly imply their doing so.

Such difficulties disappear if we conceive of facts not as true propositions that might have been false, but as the kind of items Armstrong calls states of affairs, that Lewis dubs 'Tractarian facts', items that might not have existed at all: a certain thing's having a certain property or its having a relation to another thing (2001: 277). Unlike true propositions, states of affairs appear admirably suited to be existential grounds for the purring of cats, the initial state of the universe after the Big Bang, or what-have-you. Who would be surprised to hear that the state of affairs that cats purr just is the kind of thing whose existence implies that cats purr and that exists if cats purr but not otherwise? Or that the states of affairs that the universe has such-and-such an initial state after the Big Bang just is the kind of thing whose existence implies that the universe has such-and-such an initial state after the Big Bang and that exists if the universe has such-and-such an

initial state after the Big Bang but not otherwise? But even though states of affairs appear more suited than true propositions to existentially ground the purring of cats, the initial state of the universe after the Big Bang, or what-have-you, it can't just be *assumed* that there are enough of them to do all the existential grounding that needs to be done.

It's plausible that the right-to-left halves of biconditionals such as (3), which state that if there is something whose existence implies that  $a$  is  $F$  then  $a$  is  $F$ , are analytic. It's the left-to-right halves, which state that if  $a$  is  $F$  there is something whose existence implies that  $a$  is  $F$ , that impose a substantial demand upon the size of the universe.

When assessing this demand we need to be careful not to be misled by the convention, deployed in the preceding paragraph, of describing states of affairs in terms of what we take to imply their existence -- describing (e.g.) the state of affairs that cats purr using the same subordinate phrase ('that cats purr') that we use to describe the conditions under which its existence is implied. This makes it sound pretty platitudinous to say that there are invariably enough states of affairs out there to ensure that biconditionals such as (3) never run the risk of being disconfirmed by circumstances in which it is the case that  $p$  but there isn't a state of affairs that  $p$ . But it only sounds platitudinous because the convention we've used to describe states of affairs presupposes that whenever it's the case that  $p$  there's something that the definite description 'the fact that  $p$ ' denotes. And that isn't a platitude anymore than it's a platitude that for every value of ' $F$ ', there's something that the 'present king of  $F$ ' denotes. Don't for a moment allow yourself to fall back into thinking of facts as just true propositions. If you think of facts that way there's guaranteed to be a fact (a.k.a. a true proposition) that  $p$  if  $p$  but not otherwise. But states of affairs aren't just true propositions. They're out there, denizens of the universe, things that exist but might not have. It's not a platitude that there are enough of them out there to ensure that the infinite bundle of biconditionals that follow from the truthmaker principle are never disconfirmed -- no more than it's a platitude that there's any other number of contingent things out there.



Bigelow has also argued, along similar lines to Lewis, that: ‘the word “truth” in “Every truth needs a truthmaker” can be eliminated using standard “minimalist” techniques’ (2009: 396; see also Horwich 2009: 188-9). Bigelow draws the conclusion that ‘paradoxically, truthmaker theses need not be essentially concerned with “truth” at all’. Whatever motivates us to endorse the instances of the truthmaker principle must be something deeper than concerns about truth (Bigelow 1988: 127). But we have seen that the instances lack credibility conceived *eo ipso*. So Bigelow’s friendly offer to eliminate truth from the truthmaker principle turns out to be the accidental offer of a poisoned chalice; because if truth is eliminated from the truthmaker principle we are left with only a motley of claims that aren’t compelling. It seems that we have a choice. Either we can recognize that truth is eliminable from the truthmaker principle, in which case we should embrace the consequence that we lack any credible motivation for believing in truthmakers in the first place. Or we can find a substantive role for truth in the truthmaker principle that cannot be eliminated using standard minimalist techniques.

##### 5. *Is truth a relation between representations and reality?*

In *A World of States of Affairs* Armstrong actually gave an argument for supposing that there are enough states of affairs out there -- to ensure that the left-to-right halves of biconditionals like (3) are always respected. It was his ‘fundamental argument’, intended to furnish quite ‘general support’ for the existence of states of affairs, deriving a commitment to them from the truthmaker principle itself (1997: 115-6). Armstrong assumed that even though there are neither bare particulars nor uninstantiated universals, particulars and universals are capable of being prised apart and combined in different ways. It follows from this assumption that the contingent truth that *a* is *F* is neither necessitated by the existence of the particular *a*, nor the universal *F*, nor *a* and *F* together. This is because *a* and *F* might both exist and yet *a* still not be *F* because *a* instantiates some other universal *G* whilst *F* is instantiated by some other particular *b*. So neither *a*, nor *F*, nor *a* and *F* together, can qualify as truthmakers for the truth that

$a$  is  $F$ . But according to the truthmaker principle every truth has a truthmaker. This led Armstrong to conclude that something else must be responsible for making it true that  $a$  is  $F$ , something else whose existence necessitates that  $a$  is  $F$ . Armstrong posited the state of affairs  $a$ 's being  $F$  to be this something else.<sup>3</sup> From the assumption that it's true that  $a$  is  $F$  and the truthmaker principle Armstrong thus arrived at the result that if  $a$  is  $F$  then there is something, viz.  $a$ 's having  $F$ , whose existence implies that  $a$  is  $F$ .

If the truthmaker principle were just shorthand for an infinite bundle of biconditionals like (3) then Armstrong's fundamental argument could hardly persuade us that states of affairs exist. Not unless we were already convinced that these biconditionals are true. But we have seen that they lack credibility conceived *eo ipso* -- whilst their right-to-left halves are plausibly analytic, their left-to-right halves certainly aren't. So if Armstrong is to avoid the charge of biting his own tail then the notion of truth that features in the truthmaker principle to which he appeals had better not occur merely as a device of abbreviation.

Remember that, by Armstrong's lights, the truthmaker principle is supposed to be a development of the correspondence theory of truth, albeit shorn of the assumption that correspondence is one-one:

We can accept a correspondence theory, but in a form where it is recognised that the relation between true propositions and their correspondents is regularly many-many... The correspondents in the world in virtue of which true propositions are true are our truthmakers (2004: 16-7).

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<sup>3</sup> Armstrong endorses this argument in later writings, although he now proposes that states of affairs are 'no addition of being' (2004: 48-9). We needn't dwell upon Armstrong's hyper-curious doctrine of the ontological free lunch. The complication isn't relevant because Armstrong still derives the *existence* of states of affairs from the truthmaker principle, even though he's downgraded them to 'second-class' existences.

This means that Armstrong conceives of truth as a relation between propositions and the non-propositional inhabitants of an independent world:

The truth/truthmaking relation is, in a broad sense, a semantic relation. To find truthmakers for certain truths, or sorts of truths, one wants to postulate entities that stand in various more or less complex relations of correspondence to these truths (2004: 37).

Whether the truthmaker principle is just shorthand for an infinite bundle of biconditionals like (3) will depend upon whether Armstrong is correct to conceive of truth in such substantial terms -- as a relation between something propositional and something else worldly -- rather than merely as a shortening device.

Armstrong holds truth to be a relation because to conceive of truth otherwise is to risk forsaking the realist insight that the world we confront largely isn't of our making. He considers the deflationary idea, cornerstone of the redundancy theory, 'that there is really no truth relation that holds between [a] true proposition and the world' (1997: 128). But he dismisses this idea on the grounds that denying truth to be a relation 'challenges the realistic insight that there is a world that exists independently of our thoughts and statements, making the latter true or false' (1997: 128; see also 2004: 5). If there is such a royal road from realism to a version of the truthmaker principle, whereby truth is conceived as a relation, then we will have a reason for affirming biconditionals like (3), because they follow from the truthmaker principle so understood.

Unfortunately Armstrong doesn't tell us how to get from where we are onto this royal road and recent contributors to the debate have denied the road's existence altogether (Daly 2005: 95-6). The problem is that realism appears neither necessary nor sufficient for the truthmaker principle. It doesn't appear to be necessary because, as Daly points out, there's no overt inconsistency generated by holding the truthmaker principle together with idealism, in the sense of affirming that all that exists are states of consciousness. So long as there exist enough conscious states to supply truthmakers for whatever truths obtain in an

idealist environment then the truthmaker principle will have been respected. Realism doesn't appear to be sufficient for the truthmaker principle either because, as Daly also points out, it isn't inconsistent to deny the truthmaker principle whilst continuing to maintain realism, in the sense of affirming that there are worldly items that don't depend upon states of consciousness. Why not? Here's one reason for agreeing with Daly. Realism, in this sense, is a view that concerns the relationship that obtains between things in the world and states of consciousness, whereas the truthmaker principle is a view that concerns the relationship between things in the world and truths. It's only if we conceive of truths as themselves states of consciousness that affirming one of these relationships whilst denying the other is liable to give rise to an inconsistency -- and only then if we favour the idiosyncratic view that things in the world depend for their existence upon truths.

But whilst realism may be neither necessary nor sufficient for a version of the truthmaker principle whereby truth is conceived as a relation, the two may be connected in other, more subtle ways. Necessity and sufficiency aren't the only ways for concepts to be related. In particular there may be an important explanatory relationship between realism and the truthmaker principle, whereby truth is conceived as a relation, so that by harnessing them together we may gain insight into the application of some third concept. Consider Dummett's remark that,

The roots of the notions of truth and falsity lie in the distinction between a speaker's being, objectively, *right* or *wrong* in what he says when he makes an assertion (1978: xvii).

There are stretches of language that we are liable to interpret objectively -- where a speaker's asserting something to be thus-and-so doesn't make it thus-and-so. One way to make sense of areas of language that sustain, or appear to sustain, such an interpretation is to conceive of truth as a relation to something that exists independently of us: if the rightness, or wrongness, of an assertion

that things are thus-and-so consists in a relation, or the absence of a relation, to something that's independent of the speaker then this explains why her asserting that things are thus-and-so doesn't guarantee that things are thus-and-so. In this way realism and the idea that truth is a relation perform complementary roles in providing an explanation of the objectivity of those stretches of our discourse that are, so to speak, 'factual', apt to describe, rightly or wrongly, states of the real world. If we have no other means of making intelligible those stretches of language we interpret objectively then we would indeed have a secure basis for affirming truth to be a relation between what we assert and items comprising the world realistically conceived. So before we can answer the question whether truth is a relation we must answer another: can we make sense of the objectivity of discourse by any other means?<sup>4</sup>

67-69 Oakfield Avenue  
 University of Glasgow  
 Glasgow G12 8QQ  
 fraser.macbride@glasgow.ac.uk

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*Abstract.* Is the truthmaker principle a development of the correspondence theory of truth? So Armstrong introduced the truthmaker principle to us, but Lewis (2001) influentially argued that it is neither a *correspondence* theory nor a theory of *truth*. But the truthmaker principle can be correctly understood as a development of the correspondence theory if it's conceived as incorporating the insight that truth is a relation between truth-bearers and something worldly. And we strengthen rather than weaken the plausibility of the truthmaker principle if we conceive of truth as performing a substantial rather than deflationary role in the truthmaker principle.

*Key words:* truthmakers, truth, Armstrong, Bigelow, Lewis.