

CHAPTER FOUR

TRUTH-MAKING

1. Metaphysics and language

Every science must devise its own instruments. The tool required for philosophy is language. Thus philosophy redesigns language in the same way that, in a physical science, pre-existing appliances are redesigned. It is exactly at this point that the appeal to facts is a difficult operation. This appeal is not solely to the expression of the facts in current verbal statements. The adequacy of such sentences is the main question at issue. It is true that the general agreement of mankind as to experienced facts is best expressed in language. But the language of literature breaks down precisely at the task of expressing in explicit form the larger generalities — the very generalities which metaphysics seeks to express.⁶⁵

The relationship between a revisionary theory of formal ontology and the language we use to express our thoughts about the world is not an easy one to spell out. Language will inevitably play an important role in the development of any theory, but the revisionary metaphysician cannot look past the difficulties that arise in every attempt to ‘get to’ the world through the meaning and/or logical form of language. The revisionary challenge lies in its search for a foundation or source of knowledge. If language is no longer a reliable guide, what is? Modern revisionary metaphysicians have tended to distinguish themselves from descriptive metaphysicians, as Whitehead does, by stressing the empirical element in their theorising. Of course the way we think and talk about the world will, even to them, serve as the starting point of inquiry, but the results must then always be tested against, and revised in accordance with, accepted modern scientific theories. But here, again, the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of language will interfere. Even science is expressed in a language, and it is to scientific *expressions* that the revisionary metaphysician must turn.

To formulate a metaphysical theory about the world that does not stray too far from the way the world is conceived by us in everyday life the basic structure of language must be in some way anchored to the basic structure of the world. For this purpose more, and stronger, presuppositions concerning the relationship between our conceptualisations of the world and the world itself need to be introduced. Our theoretical framework, as thus far stated, tells us only that the logical structure of the way we experience, think of and talk about the world should not automatically be taken to mirror the ontological structure of the world. Nevertheless, the main tools at the disposal

⁶⁵ Whitehead: *Process and Reality*., pp. 9–10.

of the revisionary ontologist are the languages and conceptual systems in which the various world-views brought to us by science and common sense are expressed. Language is important, and we need to be able to say something more about how and where its basic structure connects with the basic structure of the world.

In what follows it is argued that this connection will be regulated, in the required sense, if we adopt a 'truth-maker theory' and couple it with 'logical atomism'. According to truth-maker theory any true proposition is *made* true. That is, for a proposition to be true the existence, in the world, of this or that entity is required. It is a basic assumption in this work that *tropes* exist. It follows from the adoption of truth-maker theory that tropes should be able to fulfil this truth-making function. Thus the theory of truth-making will provide us with both a starting point and a checkpoint for our theory. If truths are made true in the intended sense, then we might, from known truths, conclude something about that which makes them true. We might conclude, in particular, something about how our tropes, if they are to succeed in their truth-making function, must be structured. Truth-maker theory thus works 'top-down'. It provides us with access to the world and it prescribes which configurations of tropes our theory must be able to provide for. Investigating whether a one-category theory of tropes can supply the configurations prescribed by truth-maker theory will, therefore, help us determine if a one-category theory of tropes is at all feasible.

In this, the fourth, chapter of the present text a theory of truth-making with logical atomism will be introduced. Its basic assumptions will be spelled out and the theory will then be discussed in some detail. As we shall see, truth-maker theory struggles with its own problems and requires refinement at several points. Some of its problems will be discussed, but as this is not a book on truth-maker theory the discussion will be brief. That is, truth-maker theory is presented rather than defended, and should be considered as one part of the basic theoretical framework within which all theoretical statements to follow need to be interpreted.⁶⁶

After introducing truth-maker theory we will be able to formulate two basic problems that arise for any theory that postulates tropes as the world's basic truth-makers. In this sense, the consequences of adopting truth-maker theory will serve to justify the discussions that follow in later chapters of this book.

⁶⁶ My presentation of the truth-maker theory relies heavily on the following sources: Mulligan, Simons and Smith: 'Truth-Makers'; Simons: 'Logical Atomism and its Ontological Refinement: A Defence'; Simons: 'How the world can make propositions true: a celebration of logical atomism'; Restall, G.: 1996, 'Truthmakers, Entailment and Necessity', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 331–340; Read, S.: 2000, 'Truthmakers and the Disjunction Thesis', *Mind*, vol. 109, no. 433, pp. 67–79.

2. Making true

...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.⁶⁷

Truth-maker theory accounts for the connection between the structure of our thoughts about the world and the structure of the world itself by accounting for the workings of truth. According to the theory, it is the *world* that serves as the ultimate ground for truth: the world *makes* propositions true. Given this basic assumption, truth-maker theory then offers a few simple but quite effective rules by which we can conclude, from the basic structure of propositions known to be true, something about the basic structure of that which makes these propositions true. Of course, not everything about the world of truth-makers will thereby become known. All that the theory will tell us is what basic functions selected truth-makers must be able to perform. After that, any kind of entity can be postulated — so long, at least, as it is well behaved vis-à-vis the truth-making function. On this matter, S. Read points out that:⁶⁸

Rather than enter into a detailed metaphysics of the nature of truthmakers, the theory of truthmaking works top-down by explicating the roles which truthmakers play — by formulating the postulates which they must satisfy.

The relation of truth-making is naturally of fundamental importance to truth-maker theory. Unfortunately, it is also what may turn out to be its stumbling block. Like its cousin, correspondence, the truth-making relation seems to elude positive characterisation. In fact, even the most fundamental axiom of truth-maker theory is a matter of some dispute. On the strongest version of truth-maker theory — one advocated by inter alia Armstrong and Read — the existence of a truth-maker is both *necessary* and *sufficient* for the truth of any proposition. On this view, and using *p* as a variable for propositions, the basic axiom of truth-maker theory should therefore read:⁶⁹

Basic Axiom (BA): *p* is true iff there exists at least one truth-maker for *p*.

This strong claim is contested by truth-maker proponents Mulligan, Simons and Smith.⁷⁰ They argue that it is simply not the case that *every* true

⁶⁷ Aristotle: *Categories*, 14b 13–22.

⁶⁸ Read: 'Truthmakers and the Disjunction Thesis', p. 67.

⁶⁹ Armstrong, D. M.: 'Difficult cases in the theory of Truthmaking', unpublished manuscript; Read, S.: *ibid.*, p.67.

⁷⁰ Mulligan, Simons and Smith: 'Truth-makers', pp. 287–322.

proposition must have a truth-maker. For some propositions the existence of some truth-maker(s) is merely *sufficient* for truth. The basic axiom governing the truth-making relation must therefore be weakened:

Modified Basic Axiom: (MBA): if there exists at least one truth-maker for *p*, then *p* is true.

Mulligan, Simons and Smith concede that for some kinds of proposition (atomic descriptive propositions and their conjunctive compounds⁷¹) the existence of at least one truth-maker will be both necessary and sufficient for truth. They argue, however, that this cannot be claimed for propositions of all kinds. As we shall see, there are reasons for accepting this view. But the cases in which the existence of a truth-maker *is* both necessary and sufficient for truth will be of primary interest here, so in what follows I will proceed as though (BA) is sound, stating any relevant exceptions as we go along.

Contrary to what seems to be Aristotle's view in the short quotation above, the basic idea of truth-maker theory is not that the truth-maker in any way *causes* the truth of its corresponding proposition. If this were the case truth-making would be an *external* relation with all the extra ontological luggage that such a relation brings with it.⁷² The truth-making relation is, instead, normally considered to be a kind of *internal* relation. This is apparent, for example, in Armstrong's statement that:⁷³

In the useful, if theoretically misleading terminology of possible worlds, if a certain truthmaker makes a certain truth true, then there is no alternative world where that truthmaker exists but the truth is a false proposition.

Notice also that regardless of whether we choose to regard the existence of a truth-maker as a necessary and/or sufficient condition for truth, neither of the basic axioms stated above say anything about whether there must be one truth-maker for each truth (that so requires one) or whether there could instead be several (jointly or separately). This is a welcome feature, since truth-maker theory wants to provide for all these possibilities. According to truth-maker theory a true proposition may have, not one, but a manifold of truth-makers. A manifold, that is, that does not necessarily equate with a new conjunctive object or set. So it is not always the existence of *a* truth-maker, but can be the existence of a manifold of truth-makers, that ensures the truth of a proposition.

⁷¹ In section 4 I return to these exceptions.

⁷² The distinction between internal and external relations will be discussed in some detail in chapters five and six.

⁷³ Armstrong, D. M.: 1997, *A World of States of Affairs*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p. 115.

2.1 Entailment

But how are we to understand the important relation of making true? A number of philosophers have suggested that we can understand the relation by making use of the classical notion of entailment. Entailment works as a kind of necessitating, where (A entails B) just in case it is impossible for (A & \neg B) to be true. Analogously, truth-making can be seen as a kind of necessitating. This suggestion can be spelled out as follows:

The Entailment Thesis (ET): a truth-maker (or several truth-makers) makes p true iff it (or they) exists and it is not possible for it (or them) to exist and p not to be true.

The entailment thesis is clearly based on, and makes use of, the classical notion of entailment, but it can only go part of the way in capturing what is meant by the relation of truth-making. Entailment is a logical relation holding between propositions. Truth-making, on the other hand, is what we might call an 'ontological relation' holding between an entity in the world (presumably one or more tropes) and a proposition. Characterising truth-making in terms of entailment only tells us that if one or more truth-makers make p true, then it is impossible for the *proposition* that the relevant truth-maker(s) exist to be true while p is false. This still leaves us quite undecided as to the ultimate nature of the relation of truth-making, although it does give us some idea of how it operates.

In what follows I shall proceed on the assumption that whatever the relation of truth-making is, it sustains the entailment thesis. That is, if it is true that a certain truth-maker exists, some proposition *must* be true. A possible consequence of adopting the entailment thesis in this sense, due to the transitivity of the entailment relation, is that the truth-making relation is transitive. If a truth-maker makes true a certain proposition, and if this proposition, in turn, entails some other proposition, then the entailed proposition will also be made true by the truth-maker in question. Given the transitivity of entailment, we get the following theorem of necessity:

Theorem of necessity (N): Every (or any) truth-maker makes every (logically) necessary truth true.

It may seem strange that anything that exists should serve to make a necessary truth true, but in fact this consequence is quite attractive. It makes it possible to explain all truths, including the necessary ones, in the same way. At the same time, necessary truths are distinguished from contingent truths in an intuitive way, since necessary truths are, as Armstrong says, given "truthmakers of a reduced sort, and this is taken to imply that they have a correspondingly reduced informativeness."⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 3.



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