

Replies

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Thanks to Karen Bennett, Katherine Hawley, and Kris McDaniel for their intelligent and challenging comments on *Truth and Ontology*.

Reply to Bennett

I.

Here are the opening lines of *Truth and Ontology*:

That Fido is brown is true because Fido is brown. *That the Trojans were conquered* is true because the Trojans were conquered. *That hobbits do not exist* is true because hobbits do not exist. And so on. And so we might say that truth ‘depends on the world’. But such dependence is trivial. No one would deny it.

These opening lines tell us what I mean by the following: “the truth of *that Lincoln was assassinated* trivially depends on being.” I mean exactly: *that Lincoln was assassinated* is true because Lincoln was assassinated. Similarly, “the truth of *that Karen Bennett exists* trivially depends on being” means exactly: *that Karen Bennett exists* is true because Karen Bennett exists. And so on.

The truth of all propositions *trivially* depends on being. The truth of some propositions also *substantively* depends on being. I think that a proposition’s truth substantively depends on being if and only if that proposition is made true by either some entities (objects, events, etc.) or

the exemplification of some properties. For example, the truth of the proposition *that Karen Bennett exists* substantively depends on being. This is because that proposition is made true by a certain entity, namely, Bennett herself.

Again, the truth of all propositions *trivially* depends on being. But the truth of some propositions does not *substantively* depend on being. For example, as I argue in Chapters 3 and 4, the proposition *that hobbits do not exist* is not made true by an entity or the exemplification of a property.¹ So the truth of *that hobbits do not exist* does not substantively depend on being. (More on the idea of truth's substantive dependence on being in §IV below.)

The above should make clear my distinction between “truth's trivial dependence on being” and “truth's substantive dependence on being.” The above should also make it clear that Bennett misdescribes that distinction when she says:

Merricks's distinction between trivial and substantive dependence... [is] a distinction between *two kinds of being* on which the truths depend.

She also says:

[According to Merricks] all truths do trivially depend upon being. So he must think that counterfactuals and truths entirely about the past depend upon “suspicious” being.

She then goes on to suggest that when I say that a truth *merely* trivially depends on being, I mean that that truth depends on irreducible, fundamental, brute, primitive, or basic being. But what I say, instead, is that a truth *merely* trivially depends on being just in case it trivially depends on being but does not substantively depend on being.

For example, I say that the truth of *that Lincoln was assassinated* merely trivially depends on being. By that I mean: *that Lincoln was assassinated* is true because Lincoln was assassinated, but that proposition is not made true by any entities (not even “brute” entities) or

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all chapter and page references are to *Truth and Ontology*.

the exemplification of any properties (not even “suspicious” properties). Let me also add that I think that the following three claims are false: ‘*that Lincoln was assassinated* is true’ denotes an entity; ‘Lincoln was assassinated’ denotes an entity; the entity denoted by the former stands in a *depends on* or a *trivially depends on* or a *because* relation to the entity denoted by the latter.

II.

The proposition *that Lincoln was assassinated* is true. But presentists deny that any merely past states of affairs or merely past objects exist to make that proposition true. Thus a standard objection to presentism is that it postulates truths without truthmakers. In this way Truthmaker—that is, the thesis that every truth has a truthmaker—and related theses have been taken to rule out presentism (see, e.g., Armstrong, 2004, 145-150; Lewis, 1992). Some have even claimed that the *whole point* of Truthmaker is to rule out theories like presentism (see, e.g., Sider, 2001, 40).

Suppose that there are “Lucretian properties” (pp. 133-137). In particular, suppose that there is the irreducible property of *being such that Lincoln was assassinated*. And suppose that the universe’s exemplifying that Lucretian property is a truthmaker for *that Lincoln was assassinated*. Then the Truthmaker-based objection to presentism fails.

So defenders of the Truthmaker-based objection to presentism must claim that Lucretian properties do not exist, or are not exemplified, or do exist and are exemplified but nevertheless do not partly constitute truthmakers for claims about the past. Let us say, for short, that defenders of the Truthmaker-based objection to presentism must claim that Lucretian properties are “suspicious.” (See p. 38)

Bennett says:

It is not the job of a truthmaking principle to, say, deem irreducible Lucretian properties suspicious (*contra* Merricks 38). Such properties obviously would satisfy the demand for truthmakers. The only real question is *whether there are any*.

It *is* the job of Truthmaker to rule out any theory that postulates truths without truthmakers. Moreover, many have taken Truthmaker to rule out presentism in particular. As we have just seen, Truthmaker rules out presentism only if Truthmaker deems Lucretian properties to be suspicious. So if it is the job of Truthmaker to rule out presentism, then it is the job of Truthmaker to deem Lucretian properties to be suspicious. More generally, if Truthmaker rules out the controversial theses that it has been credited with ruling out in the literature, then Truthmaker must deem various sorts of properties to be suspicious (pp. 35-38).

I deny that there are Lucretian properties.² But even if there were Lucretian properties, they would not generate truthmakers for truths about the past. Here is why. A proposition must be *about* its truthmaker (pp. 22-34 and §III of my reply to McDaniel); a truth such as *that Lincoln was assassinated* is not about the present exemplification of any property; so such a truth is not about the present exemplification of a Lucretian property (pp. 133-137); so the present exemplification of a Lucretian property does not generate a truthmaker for such a truth. Thus I disagree with Bennett's claim that Lucretian properties "obviously would satisfy the demand for truthmakers."

III.

² That is, I deny that there are enough exemplified Lucretian properties to provide a supervenience base for every truth about the past. But there may be some Lucretian properties. Perhaps I exemplify the property of *having been a child*, and perhaps that is a Lucretian property.

Bennett says:

[Merricks] makes a positive claim that certain truths *do* substantively depend on being: namely, truths ascribing actual properties to actually, presently existing things (xvii, 166, 169)...

Although [Merricks] uses the phrase “truths about what properties are actually had by actually existing things” (xvii, also 168), this cannot be what he means. Among the properties I actually have are dispositional properties, like *being such that were I dropped from a sufficient height, I would break*. But Merricks explicitly denies that truths ascribing such properties depend substantively on being (Ch. 7).

I really do think that the truth of all and only those propositions that are entirely about the existence of an entity, or the exemplification of a property by an entity, substantively depends on being (pp. 166-169).

Let *F* be the (alleged) property: *being such that were one dropped from a sufficient height, one would break*. Let *P* be the proposition: *that if Bennett were dropped from a sufficient height, she would break*. Bennett thinks both that she exemplifies *F*, and also that the truth of *P* substantively depends on her exemplifying *F*. But, as I shall argue in this section, it is false that the truth of *P* substantively depends on Bennett’s exemplifying *F*.

I think that anyone who endorses the claim that Bennett exemplifies *F* should endorse (something along the lines of) one of three claims about *F*’s analysis. According to the first claim, *F* is analyzed as *being an entity x such that a proposition of the following form is true: that if x were dropped from a sufficient height, x would break*. If *F* is thus analyzed, then one might infer, from the truth of *P*, that Bennett exemplifies *F*. But if *F* is thus analyzed, the truth of *P* is prior to Bennett’s having *F*, and prior in such a way as seems to preclude *P* from being made true by Bennett’s having *F*. So—given our first claim about the analysis of *F*—the truth of *P* does not substantively depend on Bennett’s having *F*.

The second claim is that *F* is analyzed in terms of Bennett's structure. For example, *F* might be analyzed in terms of her having a certain microstructure, or having bones of a certain sort, or something analogous.

Possibly, there is a wizard who would keep Bennett from breaking, were Bennett dropped from a great height. Necessarily, if such a wizard exists, then *P* is false. Thus the truth of *P* entails that a wizard of this sort does not exist. And so Bennett's exemplifying *F* necessitates *P* *only if* her exemplifying *F* necessitates that no such wizard exists. But Bennett's having the structure that she has does not necessitate the non-existence of that wizard. So Bennett's exemplifying *F*—if *F* is analyzed in terms of her structure—does not necessitate the truth of *P* (cf. pp. 158-164).

An object's exemplifying a property *makes true* a proposition only if, necessarily, if that object exemplifies that property, then that proposition is true (Chs.1 and 4). So Bennett's exemplifying *F* makes *P* true only if her exemplifying *F* necessitates the truth of *P*. So Bennett's having *F* does not make *P* true. So—given our second claim about the analysis of *F*—the truth of *P* does not substantively depend on Bennett's having *F*.

A third approach to *F*'s analysis begins with the following reasoning. There must be a supervenience base for the truth of *P*. That supervenience base must involve Bennett's exemplifying some property. Let *F* be that property.

Those who reason in this way should say that the truth of *P* supervenes on Bennett's exemplifying *F*. And they should add that the truth of *P* does not supervene on Bennett's exemplifying any property or properties other than *F*, lest *F* not be required to get a supervenience base for the truth of *P* after all.

So those who reason in this way should endorse two claims: *P* supervenes on Bennett's exemplifying *F*; *P* does not supervene on Bennett's exemplifying any other properties. These two claims imply that Bennett's exemplifying *F* does not supervene on her exemplifying any other properties.

If *F* were analyzed or reduced to other properties, then Bennett would exemplify *F* by way of exemplifying those other properties; and so her exemplifying *F* would supervene on her exemplifying those other properties. Thus *F* is not analyzed or reduced to any other properties. So *F*—that is, *being such that were one dropped from a sufficient height, one would break*—is irreducible or unanalyzable. (Cf. pp. 147-149.)

Recall that the truth of *P* entails that a wizard of the relevant sort does not exist. Bennett's exemplifying *F* would necessitate *P*. Therefore, Bennett's exemplifying *F* would necessitate that no such wizard exists. But I deny that Bennett exemplifies any irreducible and unanalyzable property that is such that, necessarily, if Bennett exemplifies that property, then no such wizard exists. So—given our third claim about the analysis of *F*—I deny that the truth of *P* substantively depends on Bennett's exemplifying *F*.

I have another objection to the claim that *P*'s truth substantively depends on Bennett's exemplifying *F*. Unlike each of the above three objections, this objection applies no matter what we say about the analysis of *F*. This objection begins by noting that *P* is about how Bennett *would be* were something to have happened that did not happen. So *P* is not about the way Bennett *actually is*. So *P* is not about her actually having any property. So *P* is not about her actually having *F*. But a truth must be about that on which it substantively depends (pp. 22-34, pp. 87-93, and §III of my reply to McDaniel). So *P* does not substantively depend on Bennett's exemplifying *F*. (Cf. pp. 146-155.)

Bennett says that:

Since [Merricks] frequently uses *that Fido is brown* as an example of a truth that does substantively depend on being, it turns out that he owes us an argument against dispositional theories of color.

Suppose that a dispositional theory of color would render the proposition *that Fido is brown* relevantly like the proposition *that if Bennett were dropped from a sufficient height, she would break*. Then if a dispositional theory of color is true, one of my examples was poorly chosen and *that Fido is brown* does not substantively depend on being after all. That would be fine with me.

IV.

Consider the following thesis from David Lewis:

Global TSB: “for any proposition p and any worlds w and v , if p is true in w but not in v , then either something exists in one of the worlds but not the other, or else some n -tuple stands in some fundamental relation in one of the worlds but not the other” (Lewis, 2001, 612).

And consider this thesis, which Bennett offers:

Worldwide Local TSB2: Necessarily, each true claim is such that, necessarily, given all *and only* the entities that exist and the properties that each of those entities has, then that claim is true.

A central claim of *Truth and Ontology* is that some truths do not substantively depend on being. Global TSB undermines that claim just in case, first, global TSB is true and, second, global TSB articulates the idea that all truths substantively depend on being. On the other hand, global TSB is no threat to that central claim of *Truth and Ontology* if

global TSB is either false or fails to articulate the idea that all truths substantively depend on being.³ The same goes for Worldwide Local TSB2 (for short: TSB2).

Chapter 4 shows that global TSB fails to articulate the idea that every truth substantively depends on being. As Bennett says, one way that Chapter 4 shows this turns on the nature of possible worlds. That way cannot be used to show that TSB2 fails to articulate the idea that every truth substantively depends on being. But all of Chapter 4's other reasons that global TSB fails to articulate that idea are also reasons that TSB2 fails to articulate that idea. I shall outline just two of these reasons.

To understand the first of these two reasons, recall that if a truth depends *merely* trivially on being, then that truth does not substantively depend on being. TSB2 requires only that the truth of *that hobbits do not exist* depends on being merely trivially: that proposition is true because hobbits do not exist (see pp. 80-85). Thus TSB2 does not require the truth of that proposition—or of negative existential propositions in general—to substantively depend on being. Thus TSB2 fails to articulate the thesis that every truth substantively depends on being.

You might concede that it is false that *every* truth substantively depends on being. But you might also object that the interesting thesis—the one we should have focused on all along—is the thesis that all truths *except true negative existentials* substantively depend on being. For this thesis, you might claim, avoids saying implausible things about negative existentials while

³ Bennett says:

...in addition to saying that global TSB has a better treatment of negative existentials than worldwide local TSB, [Merricks] criticizes it for failing to require a “bit of being” for each truth...I am perplexed by this.

Global TSB does not require a “bit of being” for each negative existential. This makes global TSB more plausible than worldwide local TSB. (Hence the “better treatment.”) But global TSB is being considered only as a potential articulation of the idea that all truth substantively depends on being. Because global TSB does not require a “bit of being” for each negative existential, I argue that it fails to articulate that idea. (Hence the “criticism.”)

still ruling out the sorts of theories that Truthmaker has been taken to rule out, such as theories committed to “ungrounded” dispositional conditionals.

Truth and Ontology offers a number of responses to claims along these lines (see, e.g., pp. 39-43 and p. 84).⁴ Let me briefly describe just one of those responses here, a response which builds on the above discussion (§III) of proposition *P*, the proposition *that if Bennett were dropped from a sufficient height, she would break*.

As that discussion made clear, *P* entails the following negative existential proposition: *that there is no wizard who would keep Bennett from breaking, were Bennett dropped from a great height*. If the truth of that negative existential fails to substantively depend on being, then the truth of *P* fails to substantively depend on being. (After all, *P* is true only given the truth of that negative existential.)

This example illustrates that either the truth of negative existentials substantively depends on being, or the truth of dispositional conditionals does not. So the thesis that all truths *except true negative existentials* substantively depend on being is false. (See pp. 41-42 and pp. 158-166.) So I deny that that thesis is “the interesting thesis—the one we should have focused on all along.”

I shall now describe a second reason that TSB2 fails to articulate the idea that all truths substantively depend on being. This second reason even shows that TSB2 fails to articulate the idea that all truths *except true negative existentials* substantively depend on being. This is

⁴ These responses are arguments for the conclusion that truthmaker theorists and their ilk should say that negative existentials substantively depend on being. Bennett says in several places that it is “question-begging” for me to endorse this conclusion. Her accusation would make sense only if Bennett thought my arguments for that conclusion were themselves question-begging; but she never suggests that they are.

because this second reason shows that TSB2 fails to articulate the idea that *any* truths substantively depend on being.

To understand this second reason, pretend that there is a true proposition p whose truth violates every legitimate articulation of the claim that the truth of p substantively depends on being. Among the entities that exist are propositions, such as p itself, and among the properties that (some of) those entities exemplify is *being true* (see pp. 187-191). So p itself exemplifies the property of *being true*.

Proposition p exemplifies the property of *being true*. This is enough to satisfy TSB2. For recall that TSB2 says only that, necessarily, each true claim is such that, necessarily, given all and only the entities that exist and the properties that each of those entities has, then that claim is true. And, necessarily, p is such that, necessarily, given that p exists and has the property of *being true*, then p is true. (See pp. 87-93.)

So TSB2 is consistent with an arbitrarily chosen proposition's being true but not substantively depending on being. But no articulation of the idea that all truths—or even of the idea that some truths—substantively depend on being is consistent with an arbitrarily chosen proposition's being true but not substantively depending on being. Thus TSB2 does not articulate the idea that all, or even some, truths substantively depend on being.

We could revise TSB2 so that it articulates the idea that all truths substantively depend on being. I think that the closest descendent of TSB2 that articulates that idea is identical with the closest descendent of global TSB that articulates that idea. And in Chapter 4 I argue that that

descendent of global TSB is false, and is false for the most of the reasons that Truthmaker is false.⁵

Reply to Hawley

I.

Katherine Hawley says:

Merricks...argues that it is true that the Trojans were conquered simply because the Trojans were once conquered. If I have this straight, it is to say that there are brute facts about the past, brute in the sense that they are not reducible to facts about certain objects (abstract or concrete) having certain properties (ordinary or past-directed).

I am not sure what Hawley means by the word ‘fact’. But perhaps she means—as I did in the book (pp. 18-19)—a Russellian fact, or an Armstrongian state of affairs, or an event. If so, then Hawley takes me to say that there are brute states of affairs about the past, such as the brute state of affairs of the Trojan’s having been conquered. (Recall that Bennett takes me to say something similar.)

But I deny that there is the brute state of affairs of the Trojan’s being conquered. After all, if such a state of affairs existed, then it would be a (brute) truthmaker for *that the Trojans were conquered*. But I think that *that the Trojans were conquered* has no truthmaker at all (see Ch. 6, esp. pp. 137-138).

⁵ Bennett speculates that perhaps I endorse “some form of modalism.” I think that propositions exist, and argue that true propositions have the property of *being true* (pp. 187-191). I think that the necessary truth of a proposition is to be understood as that proposition’s *essentially* having the property of *being true*. More generally, I think *de dicto* modality is a species of *de re* modality. And Chapter 5 defends irreducible *de re* modality. I bet all that makes me a “modalist.”

When I say that the truth of *that the Trojans were conquered* merely trivially depends on being, I do not mean that there exists some entity (object, event, etc.) upon which that truth trivially depends; so I do not mean that there is some *brute* entity on which it trivially depends. Rather, I mean exactly the following: *that the Trojans were conquered* is true because the Trojans were conquered, and this truth fails to substantively depend on being (cf. §I of my reply to Bennett).

II.

That O is F is true because *O is F*. So *O is F*. That is how the world is. *That there are no white ravens* is true because there are no white ravens. So there are no white ravens. That is how the world is. In general, and because of the trivial dependence of truth on being, true propositions have implications for how the world is. In light of this, I agree with Hawley when she says that the trivial dependence of truth on being shifts “our attention from truth to being.”⁶

Hawley then says that this shift brings “us into a realm where metaphysical considerations carry weight.” I think I disagree. Suppose you believe that *that there are no white ravens* is true. Then the trivial dependence of truth on being commits you to saying that the world is thus: there are no white ravens. You are now in a realm in which biological considerations carry weight; for example, you are now open to potential refutation by an ornithologist. But I do not think you are now in a realm in which metaphysical considerations carry weight; for example, you are not yet open to potential refutation by an ontologist.

⁶ But in some (comparatively infrequent) cases, that being itself is a matter of truth. For example, the proposition *that some proposition is true* is true because some proposition is true. In this case, talk of a “shift” from truth to being might be misleading, since we do not leave truth behind when we move to being.

You might add that *that there are no white ravens* is not made true by the exemplification of a property by an object. Or you might add that that proposition is made true by the existence of a certain state of affairs. Or you might add that even though there are no white ravens, white ravens “subsist.” These additions, among others, would bring you into a realm in which metaphysical considerations carry weight. But no such addition is forced on you by the trivial dependence of truth on being.

Regarding the philosophy of time, Hawley says:

Merricks is right to say that participants in the presentist-eternalist debate cannot simply presuppose a strong truthmaker principle; nevertheless it is common acceptance of the weak truthmaker principle which enables those participants to engage with one another at all, to start quarrelling about cross-time relations, the relativity of simultaneity, ontological economy, or the differences between space and time.

Hawley thinks that a shared acceptance of the trivial dependence of truth on being enables certain quarrels between presentists and eternalists. But she does not tell us exactly *how* such a shared acceptance enables this. I can think of only one way that this might be supposed to go: presentists and eternalists disagree about the truth of a proposition; then they recognize—in light of truth’s trivial dependence on being—that they thereby disagree about being; then a quarrel over being commences.

But I deny that a shared commitment to truth’s trivial dependence on being thus enables the characteristic quarrels between presentists and eternalists. For example, consider a quarrel between some presentists and some eternalists over whether some “merely past” entities—say, Trojans—exist. Our eternalists say that there are Trojans (located only at past times). Our presentists deny this. So they quarrel.

This quarrel *started* as a disagreement about being. In particular, it is false that the presentists and eternalists first disagreed about the truth of *that there are Trojans* and then—only

because they all recognized truth's trivial dependence on being—they concluded that they must therefore disagree also about being. More generally, it seems to me that the typical quarrels between presentists and eternalists over being start out as quarrels over being, and so do not come about as a result of their shared commitment to the trivial dependence of truth on being.

III.

Hawley says:

Neo-Fregeanism about the natural numbers is intended to ground our knowledge of numbers in (i) our knowledge of facts about one-one correspondence, and (ii) our ability to make successful stipulative definitions. We may introduce number-talk by stipulating that, for any F and G, the number of Fs is identical to the number of Gs if and only if the Fs and the Gs are in one-one correspondence; this biconditional is known as 'Hume's Principle'. Then whenever we know a truth which can fit into the right-hand side of Hume's Principle, we can infer a truth which fits into the left-hand side, and thus establish the existence of numbers.

Neo-Fregeanism is primarily a claim about the epistemology of numbers. But its defenders insist that neo-Fregeanism has a certain ontological implication, namely, that numbers exist.

Hawley says:

...it's not clear that [neo-Fregeans] take seriously the truthmaking direction of dependence: the claim [that the number of Fs is identical to the number of Gs] is true *because* of how things are, and not the other way around.

Maybe Hawley is right that certain neo-Fregeans do not take truth's trivial dependence on being seriously. But neo-Fregeanism itself seems to be consistent with truth's trivial dependence on being. That is, it seems that neo-Fregeanism is consistent with claims like the following. The proposition *that the number of Fs is identical to the number of Gs* is true because the number of

*F*s is identical to the number of *G*s. And the proposition *that the number seven exists* is true because seven exists.

Neo-Fregeans think that seven exists. Necessarily, if seven exists, then *that the number seven exists* is true. Moreover, *that the number seven exists* seems to be about the number seven in the way that a truth is supposed to be about its truthmaker (see pp. 22-34 and §III of my reply to McDaniel). So I think that neo-Fregeans should say that the number seven is the truthmaker for *that the number seven exists*. Thus neo-Fregeans should say that the truth of *that the number seven exists* not only trivially depends on being, but also substantively depends on being.

Consider the following question: What implications (if any) does the neo-Fregean epistemology of numbers have for the nature of numbers and for ontology in general? This is a legitimate and interesting question. Thoughtful metaphysicians (including Hawley) are trying to answer that question when they argue that neo-Fregeanism implies “maximality,” or quantifier variance, or some other controversial metaphysical thesis. It does not count against a thoughtful metaphysician’s answer to that question that this or that neo-Fregean is not interested in that question, or that some neo-Fregeans “reject a felt need for metaphysical assistance.”

IV.

The claim that there are actually numerically distinct but qualitatively indiscernible quantum particles is obviously a claim about being. Similarly, the claim that Max Black’s universe of two indiscernible spheres is possible is obviously a claim about how the world might be. Likewise, the claim that something exists that stands in a symmetric but irreflexive relation to something is obviously a claim about what exists.

There is little point in invoking the trivial dependence of truth on being to show us—as if it were not obvious—that each of the above three claims has implications for how the world is or might be. So, unlike Hawley, I deny that the trivial dependence of truth on being does useful work in showing that debates concerning the indiscernibility of identicals are metaphysical debates.

But I do share Hawley’s suspicion that (so-called) “weak discernibility” is beside the point when it comes to debates concerning the indiscernibility of identicals. To begin to see why, consider Max Black’s imagined universe containing nothing but two intrinsically alike spheres. Each sphere is two miles from the other; neither sphere is two miles from itself; thus a symmetric but irreflexive relation—namely, *being two miles from*—holds between them; and so we can say that they are “weakly discernible.”

The claim that the spheres are “weakly discernible” means only that a symmetric but irreflexive relation holds between them. Crucially, this claim does not mean—and does not imply—that one sphere differs from the other in any way. After all, each is like the other in being two miles from another sphere; each is like the other in not being two miles from itself; each is like the other in standing in a symmetric but irreflexive relation to a sphere. So being “weakly discernible” is consistent with being indiscernible. So “weak discernibility” is not a species of discernibility.⁷

Hawley asks: “If we’re looking for a qualitative ground for the distinction between two objects, then how can we be satisfied by a reminder that they stand in an irreflexive relation?” Similarly, I would say that because two “weakly discernible” objects need not differ in any way,

⁷ Perhaps we could say that Black’s spheres differ in that one of them is two miles from sphere *a*, but the other is not. But now we have left the realm of weak indiscernibility. For *being two miles from sphere a* is a monadic property, not a relation of any sort, hence not a symmetric and irreflexive relation.

“weak discernibility” does not imply a qualitative difference between those two objects; hence it does not imply a qualitative difference that could ground their numerical difference. (But, for what it is worth, my own view is that differences in numerical identity need not be grounded in qualitative differences.)

Reply to McDaniel

I.

Kris McDaniel asks:

To what extent can a principle deviate from the paradigmatic formulation of the truthmaking slogan before it's not properly considered to be expressed by the slogan? And by what measure do we determine the degree of deviation?

To answer those questions on their own terms is to give answers along the lines of: “A principle can deviate from the paradigmatic formulation by n units...” and “Degree of deviation is a function of...” I doubt that there are good answers along such lines. So I will not try to answer those questions on their own terms.

Nevertheless, after defending my views on the extent and nature of truth's dependence on being, I should decide whether to say: “Truthmaker is false,” or “Truthmaker is true,” or something else. This is not a decision about how truth depends on being. It is, instead, a decision about what to say. And I think I should say whatever is least misleading.

Given my views about truth's dependence on being, I conclude that the least misleading thing for me to say is: “Truthmaker is false.” There are a number of reasons for this conclusion. Most of those reasons are of the following form: I defend a certain position; Truthmaker's defenders have widely, and perhaps unanimously, taken that position to be inconsistent with

Truthmaker; indeed, they often explain and motivate Truthmaker as a way to show what is wrong with that position; so the least misleading thing for me to say is: “Truthmaker is false.” (cf. p. xvii.)

For example, no self-styled truthmaker theorist has ever said that there are true but ungrounded dispositional conditionals. Indeed, Truthmaker is often introduced as a way to illustrate what is wrong with allegedly true but ungrounded dispositional conditionals (see, e.g., Armstrong, 1989). I argue that there are true and ungrounded dispositional conditionals (pp. 158-166). This is one reason that I conclude that the least misleading thing for me to say is: “Truthmaker is false.” So I shall now say it. Truthmaker is false.

II.

McDaniel proposes a number of theses that are weaker than (and so implied by) “the paradigmatic formulation of the truthmaker principle.” McDaniel asks which, if any, of those weaker theses is a modification of Truthmaker, as opposed to a replacement. That question may not have a good answer on its own terms. So I shall answer a related question.

Suppose that you reject McDaniel’s “paradigmatic formulation of the truthmaker principle.” And suppose you endorse exactly one of McDaniel’s proposed theses. Then—and this is my “related question”—what is the least misleading thing for you to say? That is, should you say “Truthmaker is true,” or should you say something else?

Consider:

(TM-NS): $\Box (P)$ If P is true, then either $\exists x$ x necessitates P or there are xx such that xx necessitate P.

The literature takes Truthmaker to rule out various views. TM-NS rules out those same views.⁸ Moreover, TM-NS does justice to the slogan that, according to McDaniel, captures the intuition behind Truthmaker, the slogan “truths are made true by things in the world.” So I think that the least misleading thing for defenders of TM-NS to say is: “Truthmaker is true.” (See p. 18.)

McDaniel says:

Let’s consider a presentist [who] first introduces new ideology, such as primitive tense operators: ‘**W**’ (‘it was the case that’), ‘**N**’ (‘it’s now the case that’), and ‘**F**’ (‘it will be the case that’). She then adopts the following as her articulation of the slogan:

(TM-P): $\Box (P)$ If P is true, then P is entailed by some instance (or conjunction of instances) of at least one of the following: ‘**W**($\exists x x = y$)’, ‘**N**($\exists x x = y$)’ or ‘**F**($\exists x x = y$)’.

TM-P does not rule out presentism. TM-P does not even rule out a version of presentism that rejects Lucretian properties and every other attempt to reconcile presentism and standard formulations of Truthmaker. So TM-P does not rule out a view that is taken to be a paradigmatic violator of Truthmaker (see p. 126). So I think that the least misleading thing for one who endorses only TM-P to say is: “Truthmaker is false.”

McDaniel also proposes this thesis:

(TM-N): $\Box (P)$ If P is true, then P is entailed by some instance (or conjunction of instances) of at least one of the following: ‘ $\exists x x = y$ ’ or ‘ $\sim(\exists x x = y)$ ’.

And for what it’s worth, unlike Merricks, I could settle with TM-N as a proper expression of the truthmaking slogan. (If a truth can be made true by some thing or some things, why not also by no things?)

Recall proposition *P*: *that if Bennett were dropped from a sufficient height, she would break*. *P* entails the following negative existential proposition: *that there is no wizard who would*

⁸ More carefully, TM-NS would rule out those views if (and only if) TM-NS were a claim about *making true*, rather than about *merely necessitating*. (See the next section for why *making true* must be more than *necessitating*.) In judging whether defenders of TM-NS or another of the theses suggested by McDaniel should say “Truthmaker is true,” I shall pretend that TM-NS and the rest are claims about *making true*, as opposed to *merely necessitating*.

keep Bennett from breaking, were Bennett dropped from a great height. So *P* is true only if that negative existential is true. So something necessitates *P* only if it necessitates that negative existential. Therefore—see pp. 41-42—if that negative existential has no truthmaker, *P* itself has no truthmaker.

More generally, if true negative existentials lacks truthmakers, then true dispositional conditionals lack truthmakers. TM-N allows true negative existentials to lack truthmakers. So TM-N allows true dispositional conditionals to lack truthmakers. Truthmaker requires true dispositional conditionals to have truthmakers. This is just one reason that anyone who endorses only TM-N should say: “Truthmaker is false.” (For other reasons, see pp. 41-42 and pp. 158-166.)

McDaniel proposes three further theses involving, respectively, subsistence, indeterminate existence, and stuff. Each of those theses rules out the sorts of views Truthmaker is typically taken to rule out. Moreover, those theses rule out those views because those views posit truths that are not appropriately dependent on either existing things or something analogous to existing things. So it would be misleading for defenders of exactly one of those theses to simply say: “Truthmaker is false.” On the other hand, none of those theses seems to capture unequivocally the slogan “Truths are made true by things in the world.” So it would be misleading for defenders of exactly one of these theses to simply say: “Truthmaker is true.” I think that they should instead say something more nuanced.

III.

Truthmaker says that each truth has a truthmaker. In other words, Truthmaker says that each truth is such that there is some entity that *makes* that truth true. *Truth and Ontology* contains a number of reasons to conclude that there is more to *making true* than necessitation.

McDaniel notes one of those reasons. This reason begins with the claim that each and every entity necessitates each and every necessary truth. So if *making true* were mere necessitation, then each and every entity would make true each and every necessary truth. But—so I argue on pp. 22-28—it is false that each and every entity makes true each and every necessary truth. So there is more to *making true* than necessitation.

The number seven, like my left thumb, necessitates the necessary truth *that the number seven exists*. But the number seven, unlike my left thumb, is a truthmaker for *that the number seven exists*. I think that the following explains this difference in truthmaking between seven and my thumb. The proposition *that the number seven exists* is—in some sense of ‘about’—about the number seven, but not about my left thumb. This explanation suggests that a truth must be appropriately about its truthmaker.

Here is a second example that both shows that there is more to making true than necessitation and also suggests that a truth must be about its truthmaker. Consider the following “counterfactual of freedom.”

(1) If McDaniel were offered a bribe, he would freely take it.

Pretend, for the sake of argument, that (1) is true. And pretend that (1)’s truth violates every legitimate interpretation of the idea that truth substantively depends on being.

Proposition (1) exists. And—given what we are pretending—(1) is true. So truthmaker theorists should say that the state of affairs of (1)’s *being true* exists (see pp. 17-22). Necessarily, if that state of affairs exists, then (1) is true. So if *making true* were merely necessitating, then

that state of affairs would be a truthmaker for (1). But, surely, that state of affairs is not a truthmaker for (1), lest the truth of (1) thereby substantively depend on being. So there is more to *making true* than necessitation. (Cf. §IV of my reply to Bennett, above.)

The state of affairs of *any* person's being a philosopher is a truthmaker for *that someone or other is a philosopher*. Likewise, the state of affairs of *any* proposition's being true is a truthmaker for:

(2) Some proposition or other is true.

So the state of affairs of (2)'s *being true* is a truthmaker for (2).

The proposition *that someone or other is a philosopher* was—in some sense of 'about'—about the state of affairs of *Aristotle's being a philosopher*. Likewise, (2) is thus about (2)'s *being true*. But (1) is not thus about (1)'s *being true*. I think that this explains why (2)'s *being true* is a truthmaker for (2), while (1)'s *being true* is not a truthmaker for (1). This explanation suggests that a truth must be appropriately about its truthmaker.

Here is a third and final example. A 'worldbound' individual exists in only one possible world. An actual worldbound individual exists in only the actual world. Suppose there is an actual worldbound individual. Name it 'Fred'. Fred exists in only those worlds (i.e., the actual world) in which every (actual) truth is true. Thus Fred necessitates every truth. So Fred necessitates (1). (Continue to pretend that (1) is true.) But Fred is not a truthmaker for (1). So there is more to *making true* than necessitation.

Fred necessitates the proposition *that Fred exists*. Moreover, Fred seems to be a truthmaker for that proposition. *That Fred exists* is about Fred, but (1) is not about Fred. I think that this explains why Fred is a truthmaker for *that Fred exists*, but not for (1). This suggests that a truth must be appropriately about its truthmaker.

McDaniel says:

On a number of occasions Merricks argues that some putative entity cannot serve as a truthmaker for a proposition even though the entity in question would necessitate the truth of the proposition because the proposition isn't (according to Merricks) about the entity. And here I must confess that I don't think that I understand what Merricks means by 'about'. My lack of understanding made it hard for me to evaluate some of these arguments.

Do not try to evaluate these arguments by focusing on the word 'about'. Instead—and as I say in *Truth and Ontology* (p. 34)—evaluate these arguments by focusing on the examples like those above (and elsewhere; see esp. pp. 22-34).

Here is one instance of this method at work. The “totality state” offered by some as a truthmaker for true negative existentials is a worldbound individual. Moreover, its being worldbound seems to be the only thing that allows the totality state to necessitate (all truths including) all true negative existentials. So I conclude that the totality state fares no better than does Fred as a truthmaker for (e.g.) *that hobbits do not exist*. So the totality state is not a truthmaker for *that hobbits do not exist*, or for true negative existentials generally (p. 63).

I offer no analysis of the relevant sort of *aboutness*. But McDaniel proposes three such analyses for our consideration. The first two are in terms of *constituency*. As McDaniel himself notes, on these first two analyses, “the proposition that at least one person exists is still not about me.” Similarly, neither of these analyses allows (2)—*that some proposition or other is true*—to be about itself. So I conclude that both of these analyses clearly fail to capture the relevant sort of *aboutness*.

McDaniel's third analysis takes *aboutness* to be identical with (primitive) *de re* necessitation. McDaniel thinks this analysis would be “a good hypothesis for the truthmaker theorist.” But it would not. For this analysis undermines the whole point of taking *aboutness* to

partly constitute *making true*, which was to locate what in addition to (and so not identical with) necessitation constitutes *making true*.

I hope that you accept my claim that *making true* involves the relevant sort of *aboutness*. But, alas, some of you will reject it. If you do reject it, this rejection will presumably take something like one of the following four forms.

First, my examples above (and in the book) did not convince you that anything more than necessitation is required for *making true*. You think that every necessitator counts as a truthmaker. And so (e.g.) you think that, for any p , p 's *being true* is a truthmaker for p . Then the claim that every truth has a truthmaker—given what you mean by ‘truthmaker’—poses no threat to (e.g.) true ungrounded dispositional conditionals. I think this means that you are not using the word ‘truthmaker’ in the way it is normally used. It would be less misleading if you changed your way of talking.

Second, you agree that my examples show that necessitating is not sufficient for *making true*. But you conclude that the notion of *making true* is therefore incoherent. Then you must say that the notion of a truthmaker—that is, an entity that *makes true* a proposition—is itself incoherent. Then you must reject not only Truthmaker—the thesis that all truths have truthmakers—but also the weaker claim that even some truths have truthmakers. Then you are a harsher critic of truthmakers than I, since I think that some truths do have truthmakers (pp.166-169). For example, I think that Aristotle was a truthmaker for *that Aristotle exists*.

Third, you are convinced that there is good sense to the notion of *making true*. You agree that there is more to *making true* than necessitating. And you think that the examples above (and in the book) accurately illustrate, at least for the most part, when a necessitator makes true, and when it fails to make true. But you think that ‘aboutness’ is a bad name for what must be added

to *necessitating* to get *making true*. So you will not say: “A truth must be about its truthmaker.” Thus we seem to disagree. But to the extent that we agree on the examples above (and in the book) our disagreement is merely verbal.

Fourth, and finally, you are convinced that there is good sense to the notion of *making true*. You agree that there is more to *making true* than *necessitating*. But you think that the examples above (and in the book) fail to illustrate, at least for the most part, when a necessitator makes true, and when it fails to make true. Presumably, you have your own examples that illustrate this. (Or else why would you think there was more to *making true* than *necessitating*?) You should present those examples, and we should see whether they are more compelling than the examples I present, and whether they indicate that something other than aboutness is that which, besides *necessitating*, is needed for *making true*.

IV.

McDaniel says:

[Merricks] says that the truthmaker theorist is committed to a primitive relation of ‘*de re* necessitation’, and offers three arguments for this claim. I’ll focus on the first argument, since it’s the one that I found most compelling.

But the argument that McDaniel focuses on, and the other two arguments that occur alongside it, are not arguments for the claim that the truthmaker theorist is committed to a primitive relation of *de re* necessitation. They are, instead, arguments for the conditional claim that if necessitation

is partly constitutive of *making true*, then that necessitation must be *de re*, not *de dicto*.⁹ (See pp. 11-14.)

Here is one of those arguments. Aristotle was a truthmaker for *that Aristotle exists*. Thus the *making true* relation can hold between a person and a proposition. If some sort of necessitation (partly) constitutes *making true*, that sort of necessitation can hold between a person and a proposition. The only sort of necessitation that can hold between a person and a proposition is *de re* (as opposed to *de dicto*). So we get our conditional claim: If *making true* is even partly constituted by necessitation, that necessitation is *de re* (not *de dicto*).

My three arguments for that conditional claim shed light on the *making true* relation only given the assumption that some sort of necessitation is partly constitutive of *making true*. The primary reason that I make this assumption is that every contemporary truthmaker theorist asserts that truthmakers necessitate their respective truths (pp. 5-6). The following characterization of Truthmaker from David Lewis (2001, 604) is typical: “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.”

Moreover, as already noted, Truthmaker is often used to rule out various theories. This is done by showing that the target theory implies that there is a truth that is not necessitated by what (according to the target theory) exists. It is then concluded that Truthmaker rules out the target theory. This way of using Truthmaker to rule out theories makes no sense if truthmakers do not have to necessitate their respective truths (p. 6). This is another reason that I assume that

⁹ McDaniel says that those arguments conclude that “there must be more to truthmaking than mere entailment. This extra ingredient is a relation of primitive *de re* necessitation.” But the conclusion of those arguments is not that there must be *more to making true* than entailment. It is rather that if necessitation is (partly) constitutive of *making true*, that necessitation is not entailment at all, but rather *de re* necessitation. Moreover, it is not until much later (Ch. 5) that I argue the *de re* modality is irreducible.

some sort of necessitation is partly constitutive of making true. And, finally, there are some arguments for this assumption, one of which I think has some force (see pp. 8-11).

McDaniel ends with this suggestion: “x is a truthmaker for P just in case (i) the proposition that x exists entails P and (ii) P overlaps (or contains) x.” I reject his suggestion partly because I deny that singular propositions have the relevant individuals as constituents (see Merricks, forthcoming). So I deny, for example, that *that McDaniel exists* has McDaniel as a constituent. And so I think that McDaniel’s suggestion implies that he is not a truthmaker for *that McDaniel exists*. I think that this implication is false (pp. 166-169). So I think that McDaniel’s suggestion itself is false. And even those who disagree with me about the nature of singular propositions should agree that McDaniel’s suggestion is false because it has the false implication that no human being is a truthmaker for the proposition *that some human being or other exists*.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Thanks to the Metaphysics Group at the University of Virginia for constructive criticism on an earlier draft of these replies.

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