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## **REPLIES TO CAMERON, SCHAFFER, AND SOAMES**

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I am grateful to Ross Cameron, Jonathan Schaffer, and Scott Soames for their intelligent and challenging comments on *Truth and Ontology*.

### **Reply to Cameron**

#### **I**

Ross Cameron offers a new defense of Truthmaker. And he takes the linchpin of that defense to be uncontroversial. Cameron says: ‘...we should be able to agree on one thing: other things being equal, we should keep the class of [truths that are not true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition] as small as possible.’<sup>1</sup>

But I do not agree. Consider the proposition *that electron E has negative charge*. Suppose that this proposition is not true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition. Suppose, instead, that this proposition is true only because *E* (exists

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron says that *is true in virtue of* is irreflexive. So it cannot be *is entailed by*. Nor can it be *is made true by*; for example, *that there is at least one true proposition* is made true by (among other things) that very proposition’s being true—see pp. 30-32 (all page references in the notes and the text are to *Truth and Ontology*). So what is *is true in virtue of*?

and) has negative charge. This would not be bad. More importantly, and even other things being equal, it would not be better if *that electron E has negative charge* were also true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition. And so I deny that, for every proposition  $p$ , it would be better (other things being equal) for  $p$  to be true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition than for  $p$  not to be true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition. Therefore, I deny that the class of truths that are not true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition should be kept as small as possible.

Truthmaker theorists think that each truth depends for its truth on a truthmaker. The most familiar alleged truthmakers are non-propositions. So I see no reason that truthmaker theorists should think that as many truths as possible are true in virtue of the truth of other propositions. So most truthmaker theorists, I suspect, will join me in denying that the class of truths that are not true in virtue of the truth of some other proposition should be kept as small as possible.

## II

The ‘totality state of affairs’ is supposed to be the state of affairs of the whole universe’s both essentially having all its intrinsic features and also essentially exemplifying the property of *being such that there is nothing more in the universe*. I argue that the (alleged) totality state of affairs is the least bad (alleged) truthmaker for true negative existentials, propositions like *that there are no white ravens* (pp. 39-59). I also argue that true negative existentials are not made true by the totality

state of affairs (pp. 59-67). So I conclude that true negative existentials lack truthmakers.

Cameron seems to agree that true negative existentials are not made true by the totality state. (He says: 'I share the discomfort with...totality facts.')

But he does not conclude that true negative existentials lack truthmakers. Rather, he thinks that they are made true by something other than the totality state. He thinks that true negative existentials are made true by 'the world'.

According to Cameron, the world is 'composed of the truthmakers for the positive truths, and is essentially composed of exactly them'. Moreover, Cameron says: 'the world is essentially worldly: ...no possible thing can be the thing that is actually our world unless it is itself a world—the biggest thing there is.'

*Being a world* is a totality property, equivalent to *being such that there is nothing more in the universe*. So Cameron's world resembles the totality state by exemplifying a totality property essentially. Moreover, both Cameron's world and the totality state are supposed to be composed of the truthmakers for the positive truths, and essentially so. Thus what Cameron calls 'the world' is nearly the same thing as the totality state. Perhaps not surprisingly, each of my five objections in *Truth and Ontology* to the totality state as a truthmaker for negative existentials is also an objection to Cameron's world as a truthmaker for negative existentials. Let me illustrate this with only two examples.

First, there is no totality state, no actually existing entity essentially composed of all the relevant things and essentially having all the relevant properties. Or so it seems to me (pp. 63-64). Likewise, I think that there is no entity

that has all the essential features that Cameron says are had by what he calls ‘the world’.

Second, *that there are no white ravens* is not about an entity that, for example, could not possibly exist if there were one hydrogen atom fewer in the universe. So, I conclude, it is not about the totality state. So the totality state is not a truthmaker for *that there are no white ravens*. So the totality state, even if it existed, would not be a truthmaker for all true negative existentials (pp. 62-63). For these same reasons, Cameron’s world, even if it existed, would not be a truthmaker for all true negative existentials.

According to this second objection, there is more to *making true* than necessitation. For this objection assumes that a truth must be *about* its truthmaker. Cameron rejects this assumption, and so he will not be moved by this objection. Cameron does agree, however, that there is more to *making true* than necessitation. He says that for  $x$  to be a truthmaker for  $p$ , it must be of  $x$ ’s *essence* that  $p$  is true. (And Cameron thinks that, possibly,  $x$  necessitates some proposition  $p$ , even though it is not of  $x$ ’s essence that  $p$  is true, lest *making true* end up being equivalent to necessitation.)

Cameron says that it is of the essence of the world that it has all and only the parts it actually has. But Cameron denies that it is of the essence of the world that its parts have the properties that they have. For example, Cameron denies that his shirt’s being red is of the essence of the world. As a result, Cameron concludes that the world is not a truthmaker for the true proposition *that Cameron’s shirt is red*.

By parity of reasoning, it is not of the essence of the world that raven R is black. Therefore, presumably, it is not of the essence of the world that raven R is non-white. Therefore, it is not of the essence of the world that all ravens are non-white. So the world is not the truthmaker for *that there are no white ravens*. Thus Cameron's claims about truthmaking and essence give us a new reason to conclude that the world—even if it exists and has the essential features that he says it has—is unfit to be a truthmaker for all true negative existentials

Cameron says that properties that 'make no difference to the intrinsic properties of their bearers at the time of instantiation' are suspicious. This implies that *being a world* is suspicious. For *being a world* makes no intrinsic difference to its bearer. (Instead, *being a world* guarantees that nothing exists other than its bearer and its bearer's parts.) If a property is suspicious, it may not even partly constitute a truthmaker (pp. 36-38). Thus Cameron has given us a reason to deny that *being a world* can even partly constitute a truthmaker. Thus he has given us a second new reason to conclude that the world—even if it exists and has the essential features that he says it has—is unfit to be a truthmaker for all true negative existentials.

### III

Cameron attempts to reconcile Truthmaker with presentism by way of *temporal distributional properties*. As Cameron rightly says: 'Attributing a distributional property to an entity demands that [that entity] extends throughout the

region across which that property distributes.’ Even so, he thinks presentists can embrace temporal distributional properties:

The presentist needs to believe in objects that are extended throughout time even though she doesn’t believe in the regions of time throughout which those objects are extended: what’s the objection, then, to her believing in properties that describe how those objects are across a region of time she doesn’t believe in?

In *Truth and Ontology*, I argue that presentists should deny that existing at a time is anything like being located at a region (pp. 122-125). Similarly, presentists should deny that persistence is extension throughout a temporal region, subregions of which are various times. So they should reject the view that persisting objects are extended throughout nonexistent regions. (And what a bad view that would be!)

#### IV

I defend the claim that a truthmaker theorist, even if she is a Lewisian modal realist, should want actual truths to have actual truthmakers (pp. 99-101). Cameron does not address that defense. Instead, Cameron gives reasons to think that a Lewisian truthmaker theorist should not want actual truths to have truthmakers. Perhaps Cameron and I are both right.<sup>2</sup> Then the Lewisian truthmaker theorist should both want, and also not want, actual truths to have truthmakers. So much the worse for Lewisian truthmaker theory. But none of this touches on my main reason

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<sup>2</sup> But he might not be right. I certainly do not endorse his argument here, which requires propositions to be true at places. (For example, he mentions a proposition that is ‘true in Australia’.) I deny that propositions are true at places. Similarly, if I were an eternalist, I would deny that propositions are true at times.

for rejecting Lewisian truthmakers for modal truths. My main reason is that I reject Lewis's modal ontology (p. 102).

## V

Cameron closes his paper with some intriguing comments about reducing modality:

...we consider facts of the form 'A makes p true' to be objective facts about the world and let it be a constraint on our usage of modal vocabulary that when that is true it is also necessary that if A exists then p is the case. In that case we get an explanation for why truthmaker necessitarianism holds: it is simply analytic of the term 'necessary'.

For the sake of argument, let us accept Cameron's analysis of necessity. Then the claim that  $x$ 's existence necessitates  $p$ 's truth cannot even partly explain what it is for  $x$  to make  $p$  true. Rather,  $x$ 's making  $p$  true is what explains the necessity of the proposition *that if  $x$  exists, then  $p$  is true*.

This would be a bad result for most truthmaker theorists. For the one thing truthmaker theorists typically say by way of explaining *making true* is that it involves necessitation (pp. 5-11). Thus Cameron's analysis of necessity puts them in danger of having nothing to say about what *making true* is supposed to be.

But this might not be a bad result for Cameron. For he might part ways with most other truthmaker theorists. That is, he might say that necessitation plays no role in explaining *making true*. Rather, he might explicate *making true* entirely in

terms of essence: what it is for  $x$  to make  $p$  true is that it is of  $x$ 's essence that  $p$  is true.

Given his analysis of necessity combined with his account of truthmaking, Cameron cannot even partly explicate what it is for something to be of  $x$ 's essence in terms of what  $x$  necessitates. He cannot do this because the following combination involves a vicious circularity: Cameron's analysis of necessity in terms of (among other things) *making true*; *making true*'s analysis in terms of essence; an analysis of essence in terms of (among other things) necessity.<sup>3</sup>

Cameron might find none of this a problem. For he might say that an entity's having an essence is to be understood entirely in terms of *what it is to be that entity* (and not even partly in terms of what that entity necessitates). If Cameron says that, he will also say that  $x$ 's being a truthmaker for  $p$ —that is,  $x$ 's making  $p$  true—is nothing other than this: what it is to be  $x$  is, among other things, for  $p$  to be true. For what it is worth, I would be surprised if what it is to be some existing entity is, among other things, for *that there are no white ravens* to be true.

## Reply to Schaffer

### I

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<sup>3</sup> When I talk of analysis, I mean the real analysis of—that is, an account of the nature of—an entity, such as a property or a relation. Crucially, I do not mean the sort of conceptual analysis that merely uncovers—in Schaffer's words—'definitions among ideas in the mind'. (Thus I do not think I am guilty of the occasional conflation with which Schaffer credits me in footnote 9 of his contribution to this symposium.)



Jonathan Schaffer and I agree that the extant versions of Truthmaker are false. But then, he says, we part ways. ‘Merricks would ditch truthmaking altogether, while I would re-understand it’. His ‘re-understanding’ of Truthmaker is TGro:

TGro: Necessarily, for all  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, then  $(\exists x)$  ( $x$  is fundamental and  $x$  grounds the truth of  $p$ ).<sup>4</sup>

Schaffer says: ‘On TGro, truthmakers are fundamental entities that ground the truth of propositions.’ So, given TGro,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $p$  if and only if  $x$  both is fundamental and also grounds the truth of  $p$ .

Schaffer thinks that some entities are not fundamental. So suppose, for example, that Socrates was not fundamental. Then TGro implies that Socrates was not a truthmaker for *that Socrates exists*. But that implication seems to be false. So we might want to amend TGro so that it allows for truthmakers that are not fundamental.

Suppose that  $x$  is more fundamental than  $y$  if  $x$  is a proper part of  $y$ . And suppose that every physical object has proper parts, *ad infinitum*. Then no physical object is fundamental, since nothing is fundamental if something is more fundamental than it. So no physical object could—given TGro—make a proposition like *that physical object  $O$  exists* true. Then TGro seems to imply that no proposition like *that physical object  $O$  exists* is true. But that implication seems to be false.

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<sup>4</sup> TGro, as originally stated by Schaffer, is a claim about possible worlds. Therefore, TGro, as originally stated, does not capture the dependence of truth on being that theses of truthmaking try to capture—see pp. 85-87. So I have recast TGro. (But my objections to the recast TGro also apply to TGro as Schaffer originally formulates it.)

Maybe matter is not infinitely divisible. Or maybe *being a proper part of* is not sufficient for *being more fundamental than*.<sup>5</sup> Or maybe *that physical object O exists* could be made true by something, even if not by any physical object. But if I were a truthmaker theorist, I would not want my truthmaking theory held hostage to any of these issues. So, again, we might want to amend TGro so that it allows for truthmakers that are not fundamental.

TGro says that if  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $p$ , then ' $x$  grounds the truth of  $p$ '. Schaffer takes ' $x$  grounds  $y$ ' to mean the same thing as ' $x$  is ontologically prior to  $y$ '. Thus Schaffer says, for example, 'where  $x$  grounds  $y$ , we can equally say that  $x$  is ontologically prior to  $y$ , or say that  $y$  depends on, or derives from,  $x$ .' And Schaffer tells us that Socrates is ontologically prior to the wisdom of Socrates. Presumably the wisdom of Socrates is likewise ontologically prior to the truth of *that Socrates is wise*. So Schaffer should say that Socrates himself is ontologically prior to the truth of *that Socrates is wise*.<sup>6</sup> So Schaffer—given his stipulated meaning for 'grounds'—should say that Socrates grounds the truth of *that Socrates is wise*.

Socrates was contingently wise. So Socrates did not *necessitate* the truth of *that Socrates is wise*. Thus Schaffer seems to be committed to the claim that  $x$  can ground the truth of  $p$  without necessitating the truth of  $p$ . And Schaffer explicitly endorsed this claim in correspondence.

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<sup>5</sup> See Schaffer's 'Monism: the Priority of the Whole', *Philosophical Review* (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> Schaffer says that ontological priority is transitive.

As we shall see, if grounding does not imply necessitation, then TGro cannot ‘catch cheaters’, not even when combined with claims about what is fundamental. Schaffer disagrees:

To illustrate how TGro plus a theory of fundamentality can catch cheaters, suppose (to illustrate) that the Humean is right about what is fundamental. In particular, suppose that what is fundamental are spacetime points, bearing intrinsic categorical properties, and linked by distance relations. Now suppose the Rylean posits dispositional truths, without any grounding of dispositions within the Humean mosaic. Then she has cheated, for she has posited truths without grounds.

The Humean mosaic is supposed to be fundamental. And it is supposed to be the only fundamental thing. So it is supposed to be ontologically prior to everything else. Therefore, if there were a Rylean dispositional truth  $p$ , then the Humean mosaic would be ontologically prior to  $p$ 's being true. In other words, and using Schaffer's terminology, the mosaic would ground  $p$ . So the Humean mosaic would, since it is fundamental, be  $p$ 's truthmaker according to TGro. So those who say that there are Rylean dispositional truths can offer the Humean mosaic as a way to satisfy TGro.<sup>7</sup> So TGro cannot catch these Ryleans, at least not when combined with Humeanism about what is fundamental.

Again, the fundamental Humean mosaic is ontologically prior to everything else. So it is ontologically prior to the truth of every true proposition  $p$  (not just to the truth of Rylean dispositional propositions). So Humeans should take TGro's

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<sup>7</sup> Schaffer said: ‘Now suppose the Rylean posits dispositional truths, without any grounding of *dispositions* within the Humean mosaic’ (my emphasis). We have just seen that, as far as TGro is concerned, there is no need for the Rylean to ground dispositional truths in *dispositions*—the mosaic is all she needs. But, for what it is worth, it is just as easy to ground (in Schaffer's sense of ‘ground’) dispositions as it is to ground dispositional truths—the Humean mosaic is all we need.

‘and grounds the truth of  $p$ ’ to be redundant. That is, given Humeanism, TGro is true if and only if the following is true: necessarily, for all  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, then  $(\exists x)$  ( $x$  is fundamental). So anyone who accepts that the mosaic is fundamental cannot possibly violate TGro, and so cannot possibly cheat by violating TGro. (For just these same reasons, TGro cannot possibly be violated by those who, like Schaffer, think the universe is both fundamental and also prior to everything else.)

And setting the Humean mosaic’s existence and fundamentality aside, I shall now argue that TGro cannot possibly catch even one cheater, not even when TGro is combined with claims about what is fundamental. Presumably, Socrates is ontologically prior to Socrates’s being wise. By parity of reasoning, for all true propositions  $p$ ,  $p$  is prior to  $p$ ’s being true.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, for all true propositions  $p$ ,  $p$  grounds  $p$ ’s being true. If  $p$  is itself a fundamental entity, then  $p$ ’s mere existence satisfies TGro with respect to  $p$ ’s being true.

If  $p$  is not fundamental, then—so TGro implies—there is something fundamental that grounds the truth of *that  $p$  exists*. And that fundamental something would be prior to the existence of  $p$ ; so it would be prior to  $p$ ’s being true; and so it would satisfy TGro with respect to  $p$ ’s being true. From all of this it follows that, for any  $p$ , defenders of  $p$ ’s truth can easily claim, by their own lights, to have satisfied TGro with respect to  $p$ ’s truth. TGro is satisfied, they can say, by whatever

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<sup>8</sup> Schaffer claims that the senses of priority in these cases are the same. So he should say that the reasoning just noted involving  $p$  and  $p$ ’s being true is on a par with the reasoning involving Socrates and Socrates’s being wise. (But, as we shall see in the following section, I doubt that the senses of priority really are the same.)

is both fundamental and also prior to the mere existence of  $p$ . So TGro cannot catch them, not even in tandem with claims about what is fundamental.<sup>9</sup>

Is TGro true? If something exists—such as the Humean mosaic or God or the world of the monist—that is both fundamental and ontologically prior to everything else, then TGro is true. Or suppose that propositions are fundamental entities (perhaps they are partless abstract objects); then for every true proposition  $p$ ,  $p$  itself satisfies TGro with respect to  $p$ 's being true, and, as a result, TGro turns out to be true. Or suppose that propositions are not fundamental, but, for each proposition  $p$ , there is something fundamental that is ontologically prior to  $p$ 's existence, and so prior to  $p$ 's being true; then, again, TGro turns out to be true. And I am sure we could think of more hypotheses that imply TGro, hypotheses that might be true. So maybe TGro is true. Or maybe it is not. But none of this has much to do with Truthmaker or the debates surrounding Truthmaker.<sup>10</sup>

So I conclude that TGro is a poor re-understanding of Truthmaker. It is in some ways too stringent. For example, it does not let Socrates make *that Socrates exists* true. And it is in other ways too lenient, and so not able to catch cheaters, not even when conjoined with claims about what is fundamental. For example, it lets any fundamental entity that would be ontologically prior to a proposition's being

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<sup>9</sup> Defenders of TGro had better not say that what is fundamental does not include anything ontologically prior to the existence of propositions. For then defenders of TGro would have to conclude that there are no propositions, and so no true propositions, and so nothing for TGro to make claims about.

<sup>10</sup> Schaffer argues for TGro in §2.4. The key premise in his argument is that every truth must be grounded in an actually existing entity. (That move occurs in his sentence which begins: 'But we should accept (i')—(iii') only if the negative...') I think that that premise is too close to presupposing TGro for his argument to be compelling.

true count as a ‘truthmaker’ for that proposition, even when that fundamental entity’s existence would not necessitate the truth of that proposition.

## II

Schaffer invites me to consider not only TGro, but also possible descendents. So, in light of the above, let us improve TGro by both dropping the requirement of fundamentality and also adding a requirement of necessitation. The result:

TGro\*: Necessarily, for all  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, then  $(\exists x)$  ( $x$  necessitates the truth of  $p$  and  $x$  grounds the truth of  $p$ ).

TGro\* differs from the version of Truthmaker that I attack in *Truth and Ontology* only by substituting *grounding* for *aboutness*.<sup>11</sup> But I am not sure there is much of a difference between *grounding* and *aboutness*.

Schaffer thinks that there is a lot of difference. The central difference, according to Schaffer, is that *grounding* is more widespread than *aboutness*. For example, he thinks that the Euthyphro question is one of grounding. (But it is not a question of aboutness.) He thinks that Socrates grounds the wisdom of Socrates. (But the wisdom of Socrates is not about Socrates.) He thinks that Socrates grounds the singleton {Socrates}. (But that singleton is not about Socrates.) And of course he thinks that a proposition’s truthmaker grounds the truth of that proposition.<sup>12</sup> He

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<sup>11</sup> I think that Truthmaker should be modified to permit certain truths to be made true by two or more things jointly, and not by any one thing by itself (p. 18). TGro\* could, and should, be modified in this same way.

thinks that these are all examples of a single relation of *grounding*. And he gives many other examples of this allegedly widespread relation.

I am skeptical. I doubt that there is a single relation of *grounding* not only at work in truthmaking; but also in the Euthyphro problem; and that also relates Socrates both to the wisdom of Socrates, and also to the singleton {Socrates}.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the allegedly widespread nature of *grounding* creates problems for Schaffer. It is what allowed me, for example, to argue as follows: Socrates grounds (=is prior to) Socrates's being wise; so *p* grounds (=is prior to) *p*'s being true; so TGro cannot possibly catch one cheater, not even when conjoined with claims about what is fundamental. In light of all of this, I shall now focus on only those examples

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<sup>12</sup> But—Schaffer would add—that proposition is not about its truthmaker. For Schaffer thinks that *grounding* and *aboutness* differ not just in how widespread they are, but also in that a proposition can be *grounded by* an entity, but cannot be *about* an entity. But I think that some propositions are about entities: consider *that x exists* and *x*.

Schaffer says: 'Propositions—especially if conceived of as mere sets of worlds—seem the wrong sorts of things to bear aboutness.' I take this remark as a reason to deny that propositions are sets of worlds. Here is another reason: Lewis's possible worlds do not exist; if possible worlds exist at all, they are abstract propositions (pp. 102-111); since propositions cannot be reduced to sets of propositions, propositions cannot be reduced to sets of worlds; so propositions are not mere sets of worlds.

Schaffer also claims that *grounding* is irreflexive. *Aboutness* is not. (For example, *that at least one proposition exists* is about itself, among other things.) I think this difference between *grounding* and *aboutness* counts against Schaffer's view that *grounding* is the heart of *making true*. For I would say that *that at least one proposition exists* makes itself true (cf. pp. 30-32).

I say *aboutness* is part of *making true*. As Schaffer points out, this 'is *not* built into many extant accounts of truthmaking'. So he says my argument is 'risky'. Schaffer also says that my argument is risky because it focuses on modal accounts of truthmaking—even though, he says, 'modal accounts are all the literature now offers'. So focusing on what the literature says about truthmaking is risky, but so too is focusing on claims about truthmaking absent from much of the literature. This is a risky topic!

<sup>13</sup> Unless *grounding* is gruesomely disjunctive, one disjunct of which is that which relates Socrates to the wisdom of Socrates, another disjunct of which is *being that which the proposition is about*, etc. But that would not serve Schaffer's purposes.

of Schaffer's *grounding* that seem to be restricted to—and so clearly relevant to—truthmaking.

It is especially instructive to focus on Schaffer's examples that are meant to show that *making true* cannot be identified with necessitation. They are: *that*  $2+2=4$  is necessitated by his ear, but not grounded by his ear; *that snow is white* is necessitated by the state of affairs of *that snow is white*'s being true, but not grounded by that state of affairs; and *that snow is white* is necessitated by God's belief that snow is white, but not grounded by God's belief.

Similarly, I said that Fermat's Last Theorem is necessitated by your thumb, but is not about your thumb (pp. 22-28). I gave an example of a proposition's being necessitated by the state of affairs of that proposition's being true, but not about that state of affairs (p. 31). And I would say that *that snow is white* is necessitated by, but not about, God's believing that snow is white.

Both Schaffer and I, on the basis of the same sorts of examples, conclude that *making true* cannot be identified with necessitation. Moreover, we use the very same sorts of examples to illustrate what, other than necessitation, is needed for *making true*. If *grounding* and *aboutness* just were whatever those examples point toward, then *grounding* and *aboutness* would be one and the same thing. (That is, *being grounded by* would be the same relation as *being about*, and *grounds* would be the same relation as *being that which the proposition is about*.) And, in my opinion, considering these sorts of examples is the only way we have of getting a grip on *aboutness* (pp. 33-34).<sup>14</sup>



But I do concede that my grip on the relevant sort of *aboutness* is somewhat shaky (pp. 33-34). And I admit that it is sometimes hard to know whether a proposition is appropriately about a certain entity. And I have no formula for how to resolve, in a principled way, disagreements about whether a proposition is appropriately about an entity. And so on. But I think Schaffer's *grounding* has all these same problems. Yet another similarity between *aboutness* and *grounding*!

TGro\* is very close to Truthmaker. Indeed, TGro\* might just be Truthmaker in other words. And even if TGro\* is not exactly the same thesis as Truthmaker, I think that my objections to Truthmaker in *Truth and Ontology* apply to TGro\*.

### III

I take this to be Schaffer's *Core Intuition*: true propositions are made true by fundamental existents. Schaffer seems to think that TGro articulates the Core Intuition. But TGro's *grounding*—given what Schaffer means by 'grounding'—does not capture *making true*. So TGro does not articulate the Core Intuition. I think that both Truthmaker and TGro\* come closer to capturing *making true* than did TGro. But Schaffer would disagree, since Truthmaker and TGro\* both explain *making true* partly in terms of necessitation. So Schaffer would deny that Truthmaker and TGro\* capture the Core Intuition, even if they were amended to

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<sup>14</sup> Schaffer and I even cite the same passage from Molnar, Schaffer to motivate the idea that truths are grounded by their truthmakers (§2.3), and I to motivate the idea that truths are about their truthmakers (p. 30).

require truthmakers to be fundamental. (And I would say that they are false, amended or not.)

Maybe you think that the above attempts to articulate the Core Intuition are flawed, but that the intuition itself is still right. Then it is hard for me to know how exactly to respond. After all, until the Core Intuition is further articulated—until, for example, one explains what it is for a proposition to be *made true*—it is hard to know just what that intuition amounts to. So it is hard to know what that intuition implies for views like presentism and actualism. Similarly, it is hard to know what would count against that intuition.

Even so, I can say some things about the ‘unarticulated’ Core Intuition. And the first thing I want to say is that Schaffer himself seems to violate it. To begin to see why I say this, consider his account of what makes *that there are no hobbits* true:

...consider the world itself, as a big object. That big object holds no hobbits. Of course that is not enough to ground the truth of <there are no hobbits>, because that big object could presumably be embedded within a larger in-hobbit world (p. 52). But now add the monistic theses that (i) this big object is fundamental, and (ii) nothing else is fundamental ...the world—given a monistic metaphysics—can ground the truth of <there are no hobbits>.

The second monistic thesis—nothing else is fundamental—seems to play an essential role in Schaffer’s account of what makes *that there are no hobbits* true. So I suspect that Schaffer himself thereby violates the Core Intuition. This is because *nothing else is fundamental* is not itself a fundamental existent. At least, Schaffer should say it is not, since he says:

Let us grant that <there are no hobbits> is true because there are no hobbits. Still, in such a case, the righthand side hardly has better claim to be fundamental. The question still arises, *in virtue of what* are there no hobbits? We have not yet reached ground.

By parity of reasoning, Schaffer should say that we have not yet reached ground with *nothing else is fundamental*.<sup>15</sup>

Schaffer considers a moralist who affirms the proposition *that mango eating is wrong*. And Schaffer imagines her responding to the charge of cheating thus:

She might reply that mango eating particle arrangements always lead to pain feeling arrangements, or something like that. This is an answer, but an extremely implausible one as well. This type of answer would reveal her as no cheater, but merely someone with an implausible view of what derives from what.

But the moralist's implausible answer does not reveal that she is no cheater. At least not all by itself. She must add (something like) *that doing what always leads to pain is wrong* is true.

Suppose Schaffer said the following on the moralist's behalf: *that doing what always leads to pain is wrong* is true because doing what always leads to pain is wrong; there is nothing more to be said about why this is true. Then I think that

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<sup>15</sup> Maybe Schaffer should not have mentioned the second monistic thesis at all. For the reasoning that led to that thesis—see the sentence quoted above beginning with ‘Of course that is not enough...’—seems to presuppose that whatever grounds the truth of *that there are no hobbits* must necessitate that truth. But, as we have seen, Schaffer rejects this presupposition. On the other hand, the first monistic thesis on its own does not seem to me enough to make *that there are no hobbits* true.

Schaffer says in footnote 14 that monism helps here because ‘...our list of fundamentals has but one slot to fill’. This is equivalent to the claim that there is a slot to fill plus the negative existential claim that there are no other slots.

Schaffer would have violated the Core Intuition.<sup>16</sup> So if he is not to violate the Core Intuition—but is still to maintain that the moralist’s implausible answer helps her to avoid cheating—Schaffer must assert that some fundamental entity exists and that that entity, by its mere existence, makes *that doing what always leads to pain is wrong* true. This assertion is not obviously correct (cf. p. 167 n.11). Nor are those who reject this assertion—or the Core Intuition—committed to the claim that ‘anything goes’ in the realm of morality. In particular they are not committed to the claim that mango eating is wrong.<sup>17</sup>

Set aside the Core Intuition’s implications for moral truths. And set aside the question of whether Schaffer himself violates the Core Intuition. We should still claim that the Core Intuition is false. For example, *that there are no hobbits* is not made true by any existing entity at all, much less a fundamental one. Instead, *that there are no hobbits* is true simply because there are no hobbits. Or so I argue in *Truth and Ontology*.

## Reply to Soames

### I

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<sup>16</sup> Schaffer should think so too. He says: ‘[the moralist might say] that <mango eating is wrong> is true because mango eating is wrong. But clearly this cannot help. For she still has no ground for maintaining the claim on the right hand side, that mango eating is wrong.’

<sup>17</sup> Schaffer wonders not only about what separates my views from those of the ‘fruity moralist’, but also from those of the ‘spooky spiritualist’. Answer: the spiritualist’s views are inconsistent, while mine (I dearly hope) are not. The spiritualist seems to think that everything is made of elementary particles, that ghosts exist, and that ghosts are not made of elementary particles.

The correspondence theory of truth implies, so I say, that each truth is true in virtue of how that truth is related to some existing entity (or entities). I argue that this implication is false. So I say that the correspondence theory of truth is false. Scott Soames grants that if something must exist to stand in a relation, then I have shown that the correspondence theory is false. But Soames denies that I have shown that the correspondence theory is false. For he thinks that some non-existing things stand in relations.

I do not know how to argue directly, and in a seemly manner, against Soames's thesis that non-existing things stand in relations. (I shall not indulge in the unseemly 'I simply *do not understand* the claim that *there are some* things that *fail to exist* but stand in relations...'.) So I shall argue against Soames's thesis in an indirect way, arguing that his thesis undermines something else he himself wants to say.

Here is Soames:

Whereas facts are supposed to be undeniable parts of the world, propositions are routinely taken to be pseudo-theoretical posits... To me, this position has always seemed backwards. It is facts that are mysterious, and propositions that are obviously real. Isn't it obvious that there are things I have believed, asserted, and conjectured? That among these things some have been true, and some false?... In Trenton Merricks, I find a kindred spirit who shares my belief in propositions, and much of my skepticism about facts—understood as truth makers.

Soames is skeptical about (Russellian) facts (i.e., events or Armstrongian states of affairs). But he is not skeptical about propositions: it is ‘obvious that there are’ propositions; propositions are ‘obviously real’.

As noted above, Soames thinks that some non-existing things stand in relations. Along these same lines, he denies that a thing must exist in order to be believed or to be asserted or to be true or to be false. He even gives us an example of a proposition that he believes but that, according to him, fails to exist. So Soames’s claim that there are propositions that he has believed (etc.) does not, according to him, imply that propositions exist. First question: Then what does Soames’s claim that propositions are ‘obviously real’ amount to?

As we have just seen, the right answer to this first question cannot be that propositions exist. Maybe you think that the right answer is that propositions stand in relations and exemplify properties. After all, Soames defends the obvious reality of propositions with this rhetorical question: ‘Isn’t it obvious that there are things I have believed, asserted, and conjectured?’ But this cannot be the right answer either. For then facts—which Soames does not think are obviously real—would turn out to be obviously real too. At least, given Soames’s reasoning in much of his paper, he should say that facts stand in relations and exemplify properties. For example, Soames says that Socrates, who does not exist, exemplifies *being said, and believed, by Soames not to exist* and *being the referent of ‘Socrates’*. So I think that Soames should likewise say that the totality fact, which does not exist, exemplifies *being believed to exist by defenders of Truthmaker* and *being the referent of ‘the totality fact’*.

According to Soames, some ‘obviously real’ things—namely, certain propositions—do not exist. So not existing is not sufficient for failing to be obviously real. So his skepticism about certain facts cannot be merely the suspicion that those facts do not exist. Nor should it be the suspicion that facts do not stand in relations or exemplify properties, at least not given the reasoning in much of his paper. Second question: Then what does Soames’s skepticism about facts amount to?

I think that if non-existing things stand in relations, these two questions do not have good answers. And so I think the thesis that non-existing things stand in relations undermines a contrast that is important not only to me, but also to Soames. This is the contrast, with respect to reality, between propositions and at least some alleged facts.

## II

Fregeans think that the sentence ‘Carnivorous cows do not exist’ expresses the proposition *that the property of being both carnivorous and a cow is not instantiated*. Soames suggests that Fregeans who endorse the correspondence theory of truth can say that this proposition corresponds to ‘the fact that the property of *being both carnivorous and a cow* isn’t instantiated’. More generally, Soames thinks that these Fregeans can defend the correspondence theory of truth from my objections based on negative existentials.

I think that if a proposition corresponds to a fact, then that fact must exist. So I think that the Fregean defense just noted requires the existence of the fact (or state of affairs or event) of *the property of being both carnivorous and a cow's exemplifying the property of failing to be instantiated* (cf. pp. 43-45). Moreover, this Fregean defense requires that fact to be that which the proposition in question is about (pp. 173-174).

The property of *failing to be instantiated*, if there is such a property, is not a relation that the property of *being both carnivorous and a cow* stands in to something else. Nor is *failing to be instantiated* exemplified because of some relation that its bearer stands in to something else. So it is thoroughly non-relational. (Nevertheless, it is not intrinsic. It can be lost in virtue of a change in its bearer's environment, such as, for example, the arrival of a few carnivorous cows; see pp. 44-45.)

My own opinion is that the proposition *that the property of being both carnivorous and a cow is not instantiated* is not appropriately about that property's having a non-relational property (cf. p. 46). So it is not about the fact of *being both carnivorous and a cow's exemplifying the property of failing to be instantiated*. So it does not correspond to that fact, not even if that fact really exists. And, for what it is worth, I do not think that that fact really does exist. (Nor does Soames.)

### III

Consider:



(A) *That Mt. Rainier is in Washington* is true because Mt. Rainier is in Washington.

(B) Mt. Rainier is in Washington because *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* is true.

(A) is true and (B) is false. Soames sketches an explanation of (B)'s falsity, which turns on this point:

*...a proposition—which may be the interpretation of a sentence—is itself something we interpret.* Since its representational properties depend on this interpretation, its truth does too.

The truth of *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* depends on Mt. Rainier's being in Washington. But Soames adds that its truth also depends on our interpreting that proposition so that it represents Mt. Rainier's being in Washington. It is this addition that, according to Soames, explains why (B) is false. For if Mt. Rainier's location depended on that proposition's truth, then its location would also depend, given this addition, on how we interpret a proposition. But of course the location of a mountain does not depend, not even in part, on how we interpret a proposition.

I reject Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity. One reason I reject it begins with the claim that there are some propositions that have never been the object of any human attitude. Soames agrees:

*...in calling something a proposition, we are not saying that it has been, or ever will be, asserted or believed. Indeed, we are not saying that it has been, or ever will be, the object of any attitude.*

Similarly, I say that there are some true propositions that have not been, and never will be, interpreted.<sup>18</sup> So I conclude that there are some propositions whose truth does not depend on how they are interpreted. So I conclude that there are some propositions whose representational properties do not depend on how those propositions are interpreted. And so I reject Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity, which explanation seems to require that the representational properties of all propositions depend on how those propositions are interpreted.

My second objection to Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity begins by supposing that we do interpret propositions. Then how we interpret them is surely a contingent matter. As a result—and assuming Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity—what a proposition represents is a contingent matter. So what *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* represents is a contingent matter. So, presumably, it is possible for that proposition to represent Mt. Rainier's *not* being in Washington.

With this in mind, consider:

(X) *That Mt. Rainier is in Washington* is true if and only if Mt. Rainier is in Washington.

If *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* had represented Mt. Rainier's *not* being in Washington, then (X) would have been false. So Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity implies that it is possible for (X) to be false. For, as was just argued, his explanation implies that it is possible for *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* to represent Mt. Rainier's *not* being in Washington. But the result that it is possible for (X) to be false is unacceptable. For—I object—(X) is necessarily true. Because

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<sup>18</sup> Soames says that we interpret a proposition by way of interpreting a relation that relates the constituents of that proposition. If propositions are structured in the way Soames thinks they are, I would say that there are true propositions whose constituent relation has not been interpreted.

Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity leads to an unacceptable result, I reject his explanation.

We can make this same point as follows. Let '*P*' rigidly designate the proposition that in our world represents Mt. Rainier's being in Washington. Now consider a world *W* like ours in that Mt. Rainier is in Washington, but differing from ours in that *P* is interpreted to represent Mt. Rainier's *not* being in Washington. It looks as if—given Soames's idea that propositions represent what they do because of how we interpret them—were *W* actual, *P* would be false. After all, given Soames's idea, if *W* were actual, *P* would represent Mt. Rainier's *not* being in Washington; but, if *W* were actual, that mountain would be in Washington; and so, if *W* were actual, (X) would be false. Thus I object that Soames's idea implies, unacceptably, that (X) is possibly false.

Soames anticipates this objection, and has a reply. He says:

...a proposition *p* is true at a world-state *w* iff the way we actually interpret *p* as representing the world to be is a way the world would be if *w* obtained. Thus, the explanation does not threaten the necessity of [(X)].

Soames claims that *P*, which actually represents Mt. Rainier's being in Washington, is true in a possible world (he says 'at a world-state') just so long as, in that possible world, Mt. Rainier is in Washington. So Soames would say that in world *W* (described above), *P* is true. That is, *P* is true in *W* even though, first, in *W*, *P* represents Mt. Rainier's *not* being in Washington; and, second, in *W*, Mt. Rainier is in Washington. This implies, since *W* is a possible world, that the following is possible: *P* is true and things are not how *P* represents things as being.

But I deny that this is possible. I say that the following is a necessary truth:

(Y) For all propositions  $p$ ,  $p$  is true if and only if  $p$  represents things being a certain way and that is how things are.<sup>19</sup>

Soames attempts to reconcile his account of (B)'s falsity with the necessity of (X). I have just argued that his attempted reconciliation implies the contingency of (Y). Because I endorse the necessity of both (X) and (Y), I reject Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity.

In my opinion, the main problem with Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity is that it implies that a proposition contingently represents whatever it actually represents.<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, I conclude not only that Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity is mistaken, but also that propositions do not represent what they represent contingently. Instead, I conclude that each proposition *essentially* represents whatever it actually represents.

Reconsider:

(B) Mt. Rainier is in Washington because *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* is true.

Soames's explanation of (B)'s falsity trades not only on interpreting, but also on representation. With this in mind, I shall now offer my own explanation of (B)'s falsity, which explanation is obviously indebted to Soames's explanation. The proposition *that Mt. Rainier is in Washington* is true, in part, because of what that proposition (essentially) represents. Thus if the location of Mt. Rainier depended on that proposition's being true, its location would depend, in part, on what that

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<sup>19</sup> Read 'things being a certain way' to include there being no white ravens, etc.

<sup>20</sup> For further objections to the claim that propositions have their representational properties only contingently, see my 'The End of Counterpart Theory', *Journal of Philosophy* 100 (2003): 521-549.

proposition represents. But the location of a mountain does not depend, not even in part, on what a proposition represents. So (B) is false.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Mike Bergmann, Joungbin Lim, Brannon McDaniel, Mark Murphy, Paul Nedelisky, and Charlie Tanksley.