

Truthmaking is not Necessitation

Philipp Keller

Abstract

I present a three-fold argument against truthmaker necessitarianism, the view that all and only truthmakers necessitate the truth of propositions. I argue first that David Armstrong's argument for necessitarianism is ill-motivated and establishes only a weaker thesis – truthmaker internalism. I then argue that necessitation is not sufficient for truthmaking. The argument for its non-necessity examines first Armstrong's particular version of necessitarianism, truthmaking by states of affairs. Some of the considerations against it are then generalised to make the broader non-necessity claim plausible.

1. Which kind of regimentation metaphysical enquiry receives from asking and answering truthmaking questions depends on what the truthmaking relation is taken to be. It is commonly assumed that truthmaking is necessitation, a thesis I will call “truthmaker necessitarianism”: “The determining of a truth by a truthmaker is an absolute necessitation (Armstrong 2004: 5).” Truthmaker necessitarianism is one of Armstrong's reasons for believing in states of affairs. Because the truthmaker for the contingently true predication “ Fa ” must necessitate its truth, it cannot be F or a alone, nor their fusion, for all the three of them could exist without “ Fa ”s being true. Hence it is the state of affairs a 's being F :

“If it is said that the truthmaker for a truth could have failed to make the truth true, then we will surely think that the alleged truthmaker was insufficient by itself and requires to be supplemented in some way. A contingently sufficient truthmaker will be true only *in circumstances that obtain in this world*. But then these circumstances, whatever they are, must be added to give the full truthmaker.” (Armstrong 1997: 116)

2. The sufficiency argument, as Armstrong (1997: 115) says, establishes that the truthmaking relation is internal. Whether we get truthmaker necessitarianism out of truthmaker internalism, depends on what we mean by “internal relation”, a notoriously ambiguous term. Armstrong (1978a: 85) defined an internal relation as follows: Two or more particulars are internally related if and only if they have properties necessitating that the relation holds. The context makes it clear that the properties in question are intrinsic. Lewis (1986: 62) calls such a relation “intrinsic to its relata”. But Armstrong also has another notion of internal relations as those that are necessitated given just their terms (2004: 9). It is the confusion between these two different notions that makes him identify truthmaker internalism and truthmaker necessitarianism.

3. To show that necessitation is not sufficient for truthmaking, I will show that there are “malignant necessitators”, entities that necessitate truths that they do not make true. If necessary truths are necessitated by every truth and necessitation is transitive, every truthmaker necessitates every necessary truth, which “gives logic a certain grandeur” (Restall 1996: 333, fn. 3). If we think some of these necessitators are malignant, we may follow Restall in adopting a relevantist account. Revisions of our logic, however, are costly. Even if we learn to live with necessary truths being made true by anything at all, we have to restrict the thesis that the necessitators of disjunctions make true one of the disjuncts. For otherwise it follows, for any p , that any s necessitating that $p \vee \neg p$ makes either one of them true.

4. If some truthmaker necessitates a disjunction without making true either one of the disjuncts, there is some further circumstance that settles in virtue of which disjunct the disjunction is true: if a necessitates that $p \vee q$, what makes it true that p (say) may well be different from a : in a horse race, the local conditions may make it necessary that one of two horses wins, without making it true that either one wins (Read 2000: 74). The necessitator of “ $p \vee q$ ” does not make it true that p nor make it true that q – but precisely for this reason it is a malignant necessitator for “ $p \vee q$ ”. Even if the conditions necessitate the victory of either Valentine or Epitaph, the truth of the counterfactual

“if Valentine did not win, Epitaph would” must be grounded in something about either of them – the local conditions must not let the counterfactual ‘hang in the air’. The necessitator of the disjunction is also a truthmaker for it only if it grounds its truth in the truth of one of its disjuncts.

5. Kit Fine (1994: 4) has argued that there are properties that a has necessarily if it exists, but not in virtue of its essence: while every thing necessarily exists iff its singleton does (or any other set containing it), the singleton is essentially the singleton of its member but the member not essentially a member of its singleton. If we identify the essence of x with exactly those propositions that are true in virtue of the nature (or: the identity) of x , then all accidental necessities are malignant: while a necessitates the truth that it is a member of $\{a\}$, it does not make it true.

6. Let us suppose that the world is a world of states of affairs – will the first-order states of affairs give us truthmakers enough for all the truths? No, says Armstrong, following Russell:

“If it is true that a certain conjunction of states of affairs is all the states of affairs, then this is only true because there are no more of them. [...] That there are no more of them must then somehow be brought into the truthmaker.” (Armstrong 1997: 198)

Every fusion of states of affairs which are of the same ‘sort’ F may stand in a contingent and external relation T to some ‘unit-property’ G that Armstrong calls “alling” or “totalling” and which he takes to be a universal (cf. Armstrong 1997: 199 and 2004: 73).

7. There are no totality states of affairs, however. Suppose for *reductio* that there are totality states of affairs and that totalling is a universal, which occurs as predicative component in each and every totality state of affairs. If there are totality states of affairs, there is a totality of totality states of affairs: “The Tot relation is to be found even where there is just one object of a certain sort.” (Armstrong 2004: 73). In this ‘limit totality’, the totalling relation holds between the fusion of all totality states of affairs and the (second-degree) property *being a totality state of affairs*. But this is impossible: if it holds between them, then the fusion has to be the fusion of *all* states of affairs. The fusion, however, cannot contain the limit totality itself, because it is a proper part of this limit totality (Armstrong 2004: 56, 71). Could some other property than *being a totality state of affair* be totalled in the limit totality? No, it seems, if the limit totality is the totality of all totality states of affairs. Could the totalling relation fail to hold? The only way it could fail to hold is if the fusion were not the totality of all totality states of affairs. But then there would be some other totality state of affairs not contained in it, and the limit totality would not be the totality of totality states of affairs, contrary to what we assumed. Hence, if there are totality states of affairs, then there is at least one totality claim they do not make true. Faced with this paradox, none of the familiar options seems plausible. Even if there is no totality of totality states of affairs, something must make *this* truth true.

8. Could we adopt Armstrong’s solution to Cox’s paradox and say that the totality of all totality states of affairs supervenes on them, that we have a regress of truths, but not of truthmakers? Suppose there is a world with just three totality state of affairs (this would have to be a perfectly uniform world, where there is just one thing, a , with just one property F , where a totals F and the property of being an existent at all and these two totalities total the property of being a totality state of affairs). How can a world differ from it just with respect to this totality of one totality state of affairs? This seems impossible, Armstrong would say, only if we forget about sub-worlds, e.g. the first three states of affairs of a world where a is F , a totals F and *being an existent*, but a is also G and totals G and these *three* totalities total the property of being a totality states of affairs. The only difference between the first complete world and the second sub-world is that with a ’s being G , the a totals three and not just two properties. The ‘regress of truths but not of truthmakers’ answer to Cox’s paradox seemed plausible, to the extent it did, because there is nothing outside the ‘Porky the Pig’ fact that could ground the higher-order totalities. The ‘Porky’ fact necessitates *all* the states of affairs. The totality of totality states of affairs, however, does not: additional lower-level states of affairs are not precluded by it.

9. Armstrong’s only option at this point, I think, is to retract the claim that totalling is a universal and can be a component of states of affairs. What makes it true that some totality is all there is just this totality itself – all there is. But this means that necessitation is not only not sufficient but neither is necessary for truthmaking: necessitarianism goes overboard.

10. Are these difficulties peculiar to totality states of affairs? I do not think so: the essential difficulty, it seems to me, is that truthmaker internalists have to provide intrinsic truthmakers for extrinsic

predications. To solve this problem, necessitarianism has to be sacrificed. If F is an extrinsic property of a and a makes it true that a is F , then the truthmaking relation between a and the proposition that a is F is not internal – it does not supervene on intrinsic properties of its relata. For a could be intrinsically just as it is and fail to be F , hence fail to make it true that a is F . So if a is extrinsically F , the truthmaker for this truth is b , where b is not identical with a . Now b is either in some, not necessarily mereological, sense composed out of a or it is not. If it is then a is a proper part of b , hence $b = a + c$. Let w be some possible world where a' is an intrinsic duplicate of a but lacks F . If $a = a'$, then $b = a' + c$ makes it true that a is F in w even if a is not F . Hence $a \neq a'$. Consider $b' = a' + c$. It does not make it true that a' is F . If it were an intrinsic duplicate of b , however, it would have to make it true that a is F . How could this be explained? If c was what we had to add to ground the truth that a has some extrinsic property, why does it matter whether we add it to a or an intrinsic duplicate of it? But if b' does not make it true that a is F , then we may ask what makes *this* true? This brings us on an infinite regress: what makes it true that b' does not make it true that a is F is something that distinguishes it from an intrinsic duplicate, hence an extrinsic property of b' . By truthmaker internalism, it has to be brought into the truthmaker. If b is not composed out of a , the same problems arise. For then $c = a + b$ is different from b and also a truthmaker for “ a is F ”. Let a' be an intrinsic duplicate of a lacking F . Then $c' = a' + b$ makes it true that a is F , but does not make it true that a' is F . If c' is an intrinsic duplicate of c , then we again get a regress. And it is hard to see how c' could fail to be an intrinsic duplicate.

11. Internalists must allow for an extrinsic mode of composition, i.e. a mode of composition such that the composition of intrinsic duplicates does not yield compounds that are intrinsic duplicates. While this is already hard to swallow, necessitarianism makes it much worse. Necessitarianism have to claim that composition of intrinsic duplicates does not even make for counterparthood. If a is extrinsically F , b is the truthmaker of this truth and a' is an intrinsic duplicate lacking F , then $a + b$ and $a' + b$ can not even be counterparts. The extrinsic difference between a and a' must rule out the existence of b . This is problematic because b 's intrinsic nature, by the preceding argument, is independent of the intrinsic nature of a .

12. To illustrate this difficulty, consider maximal properties. The property of being a table, for example, is maximal if no proper part of a table can be a table. Maximal properties are extrinsic, but often essential. Suppose a is essentially a statue and *being a statue* is a maximal property. Let α be what makes it true that a is a statue. By internalism, there can be intrinsic variation in α even though there is none in a . This seems mysterious enough. Necessitarianists, however, have to claim much more: that α can cease to exist even though there is no intrinsic change in a .

13. Or consider negative existentials. Following Lewis (2001: 610), I will call such truthmakers ‘unicorn replacements’ in the following. For unicorn replacements have their truthmaking properties not only extrinsically, but also essentially. Unicorn replacements not only have extrinsic identity conditions, but even “maximally extrinsic” ones, as it were. Let α be the unicorn replacement and β be the centaur replacement and W the rest of what there is. If α and β were different things, then our world would be heavily overpopulated with strange entities. Thus suppose $\alpha = \beta$. Because lacking centaurs is an extrinsic property of our world, it is possible that an intrinsic duplicate of W exists plus some centaurs. In such a world, however, α cannot exist – even though it also lacks unicorns, α would also exclude the centaurs if it existed. This means that unicorn replacements are maximally specific: they can only exist in the world where they actually do. They necessitate everything that is the case. If truthmaking is necessitation, they not only replace unicorns, but also make true everything else.