GOD AS ULTIMATE TRUTHMAKER

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Abstract. Theories of truthmaking have been introduced quite recently in epistemology. Having little to do with truth serums, or truths drugs, their concern is to define truth in terms of a certain relation between truthbearers and truthmakers. Those theories make an attempt to remedy what is supposed to be lacking in classical theories of truth, especially in Alfred Tarski's semantic theory.

I. OLD SCHOOL SEMANTICS OF TRUTH

I will certainly not venture — I would never dare — to lecture polish scholars on Tarski. This would amount to bringing owls in Athens. Let us just recall that, according to Tarski,

> Semantics is a discipline which, speaking loosely, deals with certain relations between expressions of a language and the objects (or "states of affairs") "referred to" by those expressions. As typical examples of semantic concepts we may mention the concepts of designation, satisfaction, and definition.[1]

Designation and satisfaction express relations between expressions, names of variables or predicates, and objects or properties referred to by these expressions (originally those considerations were limited to deductive languages[2]).

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1   Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth: and the Foundations of Semantics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4, no. 3 (1944): §5.
2   To a large extent, criticisms adressed to the semantic conception of truth neglect the fact that it is not devoted to the analysis of natural spoken languages. Tarski: "For other languages — thus, for all natural, 'spoken' languages — the meaning of the problem is more or less vague, and its solution can have only an approximate character. Roughly speaking, the approximation consists in replacing a natural language … by one whose structure is exactly specified, and which diverges from the given language 'as little as possible." Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth", §6. In particular, there might be no systematic way of deciding whether a given sentence of a natural language is well-formed.

For instance, a name designating an object or an object satisfaying a predicate may be defined as follows

'*n*' designates *o* in *L* iff *o* = *n*

o satisfies '*is* F' in *L* iff *o* is F

Tarski even „decides to extend the popular usage of the term "designate" by applying it not only to names, but also to sentences" so that „A sentence is true if it designates an existing state of affairs"

If "*n*" is a name and "F" is a predicate, then "*n* is F" expresses a true proposition if and only if there exists an object o such that "*n*" refers to *o* and "F" is satisfied by *o*[3]. To summarize : 'S' is true in L iff S, 'S' being the name of the sentence in L, which designates the proposition S.

II. TARSKI'S SEMANTICS IN NEED OF COMPLEMENTATION?

Let us now inquire into what is supposed to lack in the tarskian semantic conception of truth. According to Fraser McBride,

> [W]hilst a Tarski-style theory of truth consequently achieves a high score on the meaning side — and thereby tells us everything we need to know about truth with respect to *L* by deflationist lights — it lets us down on the reality side.[4]

Following Kevin Mulligan and Peter Simons, „approaches of this kind do nothing to explain how sentences about the real world are made true or false"[5]; „Tarski's theory is in need of supplementation by considerations about the entities in virtue of which propositions are true"[6]. Theories of truthmaking, then, are in search of what makes a sentence true, instead of just defining the property of a true sentence… A truth-maker is then the "ground" or the "ontological ground" of a true claim.[7]

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3   Hence a definition of truth by satisfaction : *a sentence is true if it is satisfied by all objects, and false otherwise* in the 1944 paper, § 11.

4   Fraser MacBride, "Truthmakers", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016.

5   Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Truth-Makers", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44, no. 3 (1984): 288.

6   Peter Simons, "Logical Atomism and Its Ontological Refinement: A Defense", in *Language, Truth and Ontology*, ed. Kevin Mulligan (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 158–59.

7   Herbert Hochberg, "Nominalism, Platonism and "Being True of"", *Noûs* 1, no. 4 (1967): 416–17.

However, curiously enough, defenders of truthmakers deny any commitment to a causal understanding of truthmaking. Truthmaker theories are looking for that in virtue of which something is true, but they insist on precluding any causal commitment. (But what is a virtue without causal power?) As Bergmann and Brower put it:

> Despite the misleading connotations of its name, the notion is *not* to be understood in causal terms (i.e., literally in terms of *making*). On the contrary, it is to be understood in terms of broadly logical entailment — as is evident from the fact that contemporary philosophers habitually speak of truthmakers as *entailing* the truth of certain statements or predications (or better, the truths expressed by them).[8]

But does it work better when truthmaking is conceived of in terms of entailment? Bergmann and Brower deny it:

> a complete analysis of truthmaking in terms of entailment would lead to obvious absurdities, including the claim that necessary truths — such as 2+2=4 — have any existing thing whatsoever as their truthmakers.[9]

Following MacBride,

> Ultimately (*Entailment-T*), or a relevance logic version of it, will leave us wanting an account of what makes a representation of the existence of a truthmaker — whatever it entails — itself beholden to an independent reality.

Other accounts of tuthmaking seem to fail (Necessitation, Projection, Essentialism). This seems to me worrying. On the one hand, Tarski's approach is supected to be insufficiently metaphysical,[10] on the other hand the causal interpretation of truthmaking is ruled out.

Does it imply that the states of affairs, or the entities and properties, that are responsible for the truth of the sentences that express them do not actually contribute, do not causally make a difference to truth? If we assume that, well the Tarski-style approach lacks nothing. If a theory of truth is not just a matter of

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8   Michael Bergmann and Jeffrey E. Brower, "A Theistic Argument Against Platonism (And in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity)", in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*: *Volume 2*, ed. Dean W. Zimmerman (Clarendon Press, 2006), 376, See also MacBride: "When introducing truth-makers it has become routine to begin with a disclaimer: that the sense in which a truthmaker "makes" something true is not the causal sense in which, e.g., a potter makes a pot."

9   Bergmann and Brower, „A Theistic Argument Against Platonism".

10   To be sure, Tarski himslef claims the philosophical neutrality of his conception, and devotes section (§19) of his 1944 paper to the disclaiming of "Alleged metaphysical elements in semantics".

which name denotes which object, and which predicate expresses which property, then what is it? Is it just a refinement of what are the underlying substances and properties that are involved in such or such states of affairs, the existence of which are the facts described by propositions? What is the point of criticizing a semantic theory of truth for its lack of ontological grounding, if the ontological level does not make causal differences to what is true?

Let us consider Tarski-like examples:

- "snow is white" is true iff snow is white.

- "Bydgoszcz is beautiful" is true iff Bydgoszcz is beautiful.

Now, instead of defining the truth of the sentences by means of a necessary and sufficient condition, let us ask: what makes "snow is white" true? What makes "Bydgoszcz is beautiful" true? If our different answers are: "snow (as a mass)", "this snowball", "whiteness", "such kind of whiteness", a certain relationship between "snow" and "white"; or "Bydgoszcz", "that view of Bydgoszcz", "such kind of beauty (instantiated in Bydgoszcz)", a certain relationship between "Bydgoszcz" and "beautiful", then our question is not actually about what makes those sentences true. We are just trying to emphasize what the truth of those statements consist in, what they are actually about, what is really involved in the truth of the sentence. We are making ontology (a noble discipline), inquiring into what there really is, that is to say, in Quinean terms, which is the bound variable whose value is the relevant "thing". We are trying to discover what is the real subject-matter, or who is the real character of the story. We are sketching an alternative casting, we are reformulating the story (for instance we can say that something happens to snow, or that something occurs to "beauty", or to "beautiful"…) But we just discuss the issue as to whether Bydgoszcz or the snow are substances, if their properties are universals or tropes, we are only refining our referring, but we do not make a significant step forward in the understanding of what makes "snow is white" or "Bydgoszcz is beautiful" true. It seems then correct to follow Johnathan Schaffer in saying that, whatever be the structure of the truth of those sentences, it ultimately depends on what the world is like,[11] and ultimately on what makes the world be like it is.

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11 Jonathan Schaffer, "The Least Discerning and Most Promiscuous Truthmaker", *Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 239 (2010).

III. GOD ENTERS THE SCENE

I suggest that the search for extra-semantic truthmakers goes on the issue as to whether the so-called ontological grounds of true sentences play a causal role, or are causally inert. If they are inert, they are abstract. If they do not cause the sentences that describe them to be true, the truth of those sentences is due to a further cause, if any. I will not enter the discussion of cosmological arguments, I will assume, for the sake of the argument, that there is a relevance in considering that it is highly improbable that the entities involved in the states of affairs that build up the world be self-existent. I will therefore assume that the components of the world (whatever they be: particles, persons, tropes…) owe their existence to God, that it is generated and sustained by God. He makes them exist. And, this is my second assumption, this „making" is not a temporal operation, but a timeless relation of ontological dependence.

Let us now turn to consider to which extent God can be considered as a good candidate for the „ontological ground" of truthmaking in a causal understanding of making. My suggestion is that the lack of ontological grounding can be completed by the causal relation of God to his creatures. This is the issue as to which extent God can be said to cause, to bring about truths. Let us now inquire more frankly into the relation of God to truth and let us turn to the old debate of divine alethic sovereignty. According to Descartes, God being omnipotent is indifferent to "every reason of truth and goodness" in the sense that all truths, contingent, necessary and moral, are alike His creatures and might very well have been other than they are if He had chosen. Does it mean that God arbitrarily enacts what is true? I would like to advocate the view that God neither arbitrarily choses what counts as a truth, nor just discovers truthes which would hold independently from him.

To that purpose, I will follow Kretzmann's move as regards God and the basis of morality. I suggest to draw a parallel between the relationship of God to truth, and the relationship of God to goodness. This move or this parallel may provide some answer to the riddles raised by the contemporary doctrine of truthmakers.

By this move, I seem to be committed to the antique doctrine of the transcendantals, according to which God is the Being in itself, the Good in istelf, the Truth in itself… This is not my main concern. But of of course I will try to make sense of it. And I will suggest a shift from God being the truth in itself to God as ultimate Truthmaker. I will just focus on the relevance of the causal interpreta-

tion of truthmaking, so far as truth is grounded on being, and being depends on God. If statements are made true by states of affairs[12] and if states of affairs are brought about by God, God is the ultimate truthmaker. Of course this makes a quantifier shift from „for each truth there is something that makes it true" to „there is soemthing that makes every truth true" (but not every shift is a flaw).

IV. KRETZMANN ON THE BASIS OF MORALITY

Let us quickly recall Norman Kretzmann's argument in his paper[13] devoted to God and the basis of morality where he faces the dilemma of Euthyphro.

I will then try to do the same move as regards God and the basis of truth, firstly as regards contingent truths, and secondly logical or necessary ones.

Let us now recall the context of the platonic dialogue. Socrates is asking Euthypro about the essence of piety ('paieti'): "tell me then what is the pious?" (5d). After some attempts, Euthypro claims that "the pious is what all the gods love" (9e): Piety is what Gods approve of. But as Socrates suggests, there are two ways of construing this claim: Do the Gods approve of what is pious because it is pious, or is it pious because the Gods approve of it ? (10a) Following this line of distinction, Norman Kretzmann has contrasted two theories of religious morality (which he expressed monotheistically)

- (Moral Objectivism) God approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong

- (Divine Moral Subjectivism) Right actions are right just because god approves of them and wrong just because God disapproves of them.

This theory corresponds partly to divine command ethics (supported by Mansell and duly criticized by Mill).

As Kretzmann puts it (DMS) is welcoming "the possibility that absolutely any action could be made morally right simply in virtue of God's commanding or approving of it". It would be pointless to claim that God is good and so "can be relied on not to approve of moral evil", for, according to (DMS),

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12   John L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 3. ed., ed. James O. Urmson (OUP, 1979), 123.
13   Norman Kretzmann, "Abraham, Isaac and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality", in *Hamartia*: *The concept of error in the western tradition essays in honor of John M. Crossett*, ed. Donald V. Stump et al. (Edwin Mellen Press, 1983).

"the only standard of moral goodness is God's approval". And then there is no objective grounding of morality. So it seems that any theist who wants to advocate moral objectivism is committed to Theological Moral Objectivism. But this theory, if less shocking, raises a problem.

In this theory God has nothing essential to do with morality. He just happens to command, or to approve of, what is defined as morally right, and to forbid and disapprove of what is defined as morally wrong. The standard of moral goodness is above God. And there is still the question: where does it come from? Which process, or who is responsible for this brute unaccountable state of affairs that such and such deeds are said to be objectively morally right or wrong? So, on the one hand, morality is an arbitrary matter. On the other hand, God is not the supreme standard of Goodness any more. But there is a way out to escape this dilemma. It consists in claiming that "God is identical with goodness". On this view, God does not arbitrarily chose what is good. And, being the Good in itself, God cannot but create states of affairs that are good. He cannot but see "that it was good". Nor does God passively conform to standards of morality. In creating, he acts well and good, for he is the Good in itself.

And then there is no more contrast between objectivism and subjectivism, there is no more dependency of God on preexisting rules of morals, and no more arbitrary choice of God. Therefore, Kretzmann rephrases the two branches of the dilemma which then vanishes:

(MO')   God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect moral goodness itself approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong.

(DMS') Right actions are right just because God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself

(By the way this could offer a solution of the is/ought problem. For if God is identical with perfect goodness itself, the world he brings about owes its existence to Goodness itself, and then rational agents who, as a matter of fact, owe their existence and capacities to Goodness, may be supposed to acknowledge and act justly, neither on the basis of arbitrary commands, nor in conforming to moral standards independent from God. What they are (creatures) suggest how they ought to live: in respecting the life and sharing the natural resources they owe to the creator, and so on... This was the traditional justification of the Rights of Man).

V. ALETHIC DIVINE SUBJECTIVISM/OBJECTIVISM

Can we make a similar move concerning truths, or true statements? Does God arbitrarily enact them? Then Alethic Divine Subjectivism is true. Or has he to conform to epistemic facts which are imposed to him? Then there is some very important feature of the world that does not depend on Him. Let us then try to define God as the ontological grouding of truth

(Alethic Objectivism) God knows whatever is true just because it is the case

(Divine Alethic Subjectivism) Whatever is true is true just because God knows it

(AO') God conceived of as truth itself knows whatever is true just because they are the case

(DAS') Whatever is true holds just because God conceived of as truth itself knows it

Then Alethic objectivism holds, and nevertheless we are in a position to concile alethic objectivism with God's alleged absolute sovereignty. But this leaves us with at least two questions: the issue as to what does identifying God with truth in itself amount to; and the issue as to what kind of knowledge can be ascribed to God as ultimate Truthmaker?

VI. TRUTH IN ITSELF AS ULTIMATE TRUTHMAKING

As regards the first issue: what does identifying God with truth in itself amount to? And how are we to justify such a claim?

In the tradition of neoplatonic metaphysics, there is the claim that for any class of members to which the same name applies, there exists an Idea, a separate Form, bearing the same name, in virtue of which that name may be truly applied to them. Some qualifications may be added, in order to avoid worrying consequences. This Idea is not a member of the class, it is not endowed with the property it is accounting for. (This rules out the problem of self-predication and defeats the argument of the third man). This rests on the so-called „one-over-many assumption":

> For every class of x such as x is F, there is a F-ness in virtue of which F applies to every x. (F-ness is not F)

If we consider the class of true sentences (in a given object language), according to this "One-over-many assumption", there is a true-ness = a truth in virtue of which the predicate 'true' applies to each sentence in T.

Accordingly, this truth in itself, this Prima Veritas, as Aquinas terms it, is not a property, it is what accounts for such and such sentences having the property of being true. And here we are committed to draw a sharp distinction between truth and true (like we should distinguish beween Goodness and good, health and healthy…) What is called Truth itself is not some true device, not even some maximally true one, but the very source of every true sentence, that is, if we rehabilitate the causal interpretation of truthmaking, God as ultimate Truthmaker.

Why should we accept the One-over-many assumption, especially in the case of true sentences? Here is my argument:

(1) God is the generating and sustaining cause of every state of affairs.

(2) The states of affairs are the truthmakers of the propositions that describe them.

(3) True sentences express propositions that describe the existing states of affairs.

(4) God is the ultimate truthmaker

(The Wittgensteinian shortcut would be the famous motto from the Notebooks (1914-1916) "God is the way everything happens". One could compare „4.12 Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it — logical form. In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world." and Armstrong: „any truth should depend for its truth on something „outside" it, in virtue of which it is true"[14])

To put it otherwise: truth being a property of any statement or of a proposition which declares what there is and what is the case, if there is an ultimate generating and sustaining cause of every state of affairs, this cause is the onto-

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14   David M. Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

logical grounding of the truth of the sentences describing the states of affairs at stake, that is their ultimate truthmaker.

VII. DIVINE KNOW-HOW AND WORLD'S MAKING OF

The second issue we were left with is the concern of God's knowledge of true propositions. This might require further explanation, as regards what does it mean for God to know contingent truths, of which he is the truthmaker. This explanation might be found in the model of what Anscombe, after Aquinas, terms God's pratical knowledge. In order to make sense of this compatibility of alethic objectivism and divine independence, the kind of knowledge we have to ascribe to God is neither observational, nor predictive.

> speculative reason only apprehends things (ratio speculativa est apprehensiva solum rerum), [...] practical reason not only apprehends but also causes them (non solum apprehensiva, sed etiam causativa)[15]

God has a practical knowledge of every singular beings and modes, since he is the one who generates and sustains them. He knows everything that happens by bringing about the very existence and operation of every object involved in every state of affairs, including free deeds and demands made by some creatures[16].

If we deny this view, then we get a dualistic view, according to which there is or there are objects and operations which do not depend on God. (This raises problems for theodicy)

God knows what the world is like, and may even know what it is like to be a bat, a vat, a brain in vat, a heroe, a villain, an ordinary person, and so on. In order to do so, he does not need to experience perspectives on the world. In order to be truly omniscient, God must not have all the phenomenal concepts (concepts about what it is like to have such and such phenomenal experiences any finite conscious beings may have). God does not need nor want any point of view. He sees ("And God saw…" that is : He sees timelessly) what he makes.

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15   Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 83, art.1c.
16   Thomas Flint precludes the account that God knows our free actions by knowing his own intentions to cause us to act in certain ways, for such external causation is, according to the libertarian, is incompatible with freedom, Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1998), 35.

As William Hasker puts it, „The way God knows things to be is the way things really are"[17]. The following view seems to me consistent:

- God timelessly brings about a world made of successive temporal events.

- God knows what he is timelessly doing.

- God is not committed to observe within a temporal framework what he otherwise knows perfectly by timelessly doing it.

- God knows perfectly what's going on, what happens to everyone, everywhere and always.

He knows, because he does. According to Anscombe, being the first agent timelessly involved in every action, he could say „I do what happens".[18]

To this extent, God's bringing about every state of affairs is the practical way God makes the truth of the statements that describe them. He knows what he makes.

So far I have been dealing with the contingent truths that describe contingent states of affairs. But what about analytic truthes, or logical laws? What about necessary truths (if any)? There is a classical issue as to whether God, as an agent, is bound by any laws or theorems of logic, and whether he freely

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17   Which does not entail „The way in which God knows things (i.e. his manner of knowing them) is the same as the way in which they exist" William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 166.

18   G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Blackwell, 1957), 53. Cf. the passage by Aquinas cited in Fn 15, where the concept of non-observational knowledge is first compared with the knowledge one has of the position and movements of one's limbs, that can be known "even with your eyes shut"(I, 15), and without there being any "separately describable sensations" (ibid.,13) that give rise to your knowledge. "Later on, she compares the knowledge one has of one's actions to the knowledge of a project supervisor who directs the construction of a building from afar, without seeing or hearing any reports on its progress (ibid., 82); to one's ability to know what one is writing even if one's eyes are closed (ibid., 53, 82); to God's knowledge of creation (ibid., 87); and to a list that a shopper carries with him that directs his purchases, in contrast to a list made by a detective who follows the shopper around (*Intention*, 56)" John Schwenkler, "Understanding 'Practical Knowledge'" 15 (2015): 29. Of course, among the instances of practical knowledge, God's causation of the world is the only timeless one, if we adopt the ontological relational view, rather than the transitional account of creation. So we have to justify that the former holds. In the transitional account, "once there was nothing (but God), then there was something", creation is supposed to describe the transition from nothingness to being. Something is supposed to happen to nothing, which happens to become something. This amounts to ascribe properties to "nothing", which is absurd.

enacts and may repeal or rescind them. For instance, is God the truthmaker of the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, the laws of inference…

My suggestion is: The law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, the laws of inference (modus ponens and tollens), supposed that they hold, are not standards to which God has to conform. But they are neither decrees he enacts arbitrarily. They are general features describing the way things behave, and the relations that hold between the states of affairs the world is made of. And, if there is a God conceived of as a generating and sustaining cause of the universe, then the way things behave entirely depends on Him. It expresses God's operation.

Suppose that God had created a world in which things are continuously replaced by other items. The concept of a permanent substrate of change would be pointless. May be the concept of the place where different items appear and disappear would be more difficult to acquire, for in order to identify some place, you need some quasi permanent objects …

To this extent, we could agree that "eternal truths" as Descartes puts it, "are not known as true by God in any way which would imply that they are true independently of Him". For they are true in a way which implies that they depend on what there is and how the world goes. And to the extent to which everything there is and how the world goes depend on God, those "eternal truths" still depend on God. But they are not enacted arbitrarily. They supervene on how the world is, which on its turn depends on how God makes it.

The very structure of facts and substances could have been such as we would live in a megaric world, a world of substances without predicates, or heraclitean: no identifyable entities, only moves, changes, flows, in both cases objects without properties (pure parmenidian beings) or events without objects to which they occur. We could not predicate some property of any subject. There could have existed no substances at all, and no identifyable properties. To this extent, the laws of logic might be said to supervene on ontological features. They are not just semantic or logic principles, they describe deep features and structures of being.

VIII. CONCLUSION

I am not advocating at all cost a theory of Truthmaking. My point is just as follows. If the semantic theory of truth were to be replaced or at least completed by Truthmakers, then God, conceived of as the timeless generating

and sustaining cause of the universe, would be the best if not the sole candidate for the function of ultimate truthmaker. But this is requiring the very metaphysical One-over-many assumption, and this commits us to a causal understanding of truthmaking, not in the sense that

- God brings about that 'p'is true iff p;

But in the sense that:

- 'p' is true iff God brings about that p.

The semantic Tarskian convention would remain an epistemic convention, the genuine truthmaking relation would complete on the reality side the alleged relation of ontological dependence of everything that there is on the One that is. If so, there is no need any more to restrict truthmaking to positive propositions, for if the truth of positive propositions describing the states of affairs that occurred, are occurring or will occur depend on what God as a generating and sustaining cause make exist, the truth of negative propositions equally depend on God's causal activity, since the state of affairs that do not occur equally depend on God's causal activity.

Of course, one may stick to the perplexity expressed by Liggins, claiming that "it is hard to see how the thought that truth is grounded in reality lends any support to truthmaker theory"[19]. Or we could be content with identifying, like Schaffer, the world as "the one and only truth maker" (which he terms ironically "the least discerning and most promiscuous truthmaker"), adding to his "elegant and economical account of truthmaker"[20] a Maker of the world.

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19   David Liggins, "Truthmakers and the Groundedness of Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 108, no. 1pt2 (2008): 177.
20   Johnathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What", in *Metametaphysics*: *New essays on the foundations of ontology*, ed. David J. Chalmers, David Manley and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford University Press, 2009), 307.

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