# *Truthmakers*

If we say 'the cup is on the table', and the cup *is* on the table, then it seems common sense to say that the situation on the table makes the sentence true, and picking up the cup will falsify it. Given the meaning of the sentence, it couldn't fail to be true in that situation, so the situation necessitates the truth of the sentence. An interesting proposal is to universalise these observations, and claim that *all* sentences (or propositions) have truthmakers of some sort. That is, no sentence can be true if it lacks a truthmaker, and the truthmaker always necessitates its truth. This is a potentially powerful idea, because it focuses all human enquiry, in philosophy, science and daily life, on what makes something true, and offers grounds for dismissing 'truths' which do not seem to have any truthmaker. Empirical scientists will be happy with this, but it is a challenging idea in metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, education, politics and religion.

The proposal is attractive because the truth of a sentence seems to *track* the situation in the world, and depend on it. The truthmaker of a sentence also *explains* its truth, as is obvious if we ask *why* the sentence 'the cup is on the table' is true. It might be tempting, when we think of trickier cases, to just say that many (but not all) truths have truthmakers, but if simple cases of truth are made true and explained by their truthmakers, it is hard to see how the remaining sentences could be true for some entirely different reason (or for no reason at all). Hence it seems to be an all-or-nothing theory. It appeals to realists and naturalists in philosophy, because it anchors truths in a single external reality (though idealists could have their own version of truthmaking).

Possible counterexamples to the proposal that truthmaking is universal are necessary or analytic truths (such as logic or mathematics), truths about the non-existence of something, universal general truths, principles of thought (such as Ockham's Razor) and of value, and truths of fiction or of possibilities. Finding truthmakers for truths about the past also seems tricky. Some further unjustified principle, such as pragmatism, coherence, consistency or simplicity, may be needed to identify the right truthmakers, so truthmaking will not be the very foundation of our thinking. On the other hand, many truthmakers will in turn have their own truthmakers, suggesting a regress that takes us down to the basic elements of our understanding. If we take candidates for truth to be propositions (unambiguous thoughts which can be true or false), then the two big issues for the theory are to specify what sorts of things qualify as truthmakers, and to say what the relationship is between truths and their truthmakers.

**Truthmakers** are normally said to be '**entities**', so that any truth entails some entity which makes it true. If the entity is an 'object' then we might say that the intrinsic nature of the object necessitates the truth, but this seems too strong, since some truths are about peripheral trivialities. We might think that '**facts**' are more plausible truthmakers, but facts are notoriously vague, and are often defined in terms of what is true, which would make the proposal circular. A better suggestion is that '**states of affairs**' do the job, if we take any single complete thought to be about some state of affairs. We interpret a sentence by asking what it is about, and then what it says about its topic. This usually points us towards some selected chunk of reality (perhaps the 'truth-conditions' of the sentence), and how that chunk is situated tells us whether the sentence is a truth. We can take the truthmaker to be the minimal aspect of that chunk (or state of affairs) which is sufficient to necessitate the truth of the sentence. If we say 'a lion exists', then any one lion will be the state of affairs required. The state of affairs must also be understood, to the extent that it will explain the truth which it supports. A state of affairs may consist not only of the existence of some entities, but also ways those entities are, or ways they behave. The best alternative to the state-of-affairs view says that truthmakers are too varied to fall under one heading. The concept of truthmakers is reinforced by the implausibility of universal 'falsemakers', showing that where T and F seem symmetrical in logic, they are certainly not in real life.

If we settle for truth-bearers being 'propositions', and truthmakers being (roughly) 'states of affairs', the hard part is to specify the **relationship** between them. The key fact about 'truthmaking' is that it is an active one-way relationship, which sharply distinguishes it from the two-way inactive relationship of **correspondence** in the traditional theory of truth. Correspondence is also a one-to-one relation, but truths like 'a lion exists' can have many truthmakers, and one state of affairs necessitates many truths. The exact meaning of 'correspond' was always unclear, but the truthmaking relation does not demand that sort of detail (though it does demand necessitation). We might say that correspondence is a particular view of truthmaking, or that correspondence is confined to the simplest truths. Correspondence attempts to analyse 'truth' itself, but truthmaking theory does not address that problem.

It seems unlikely that a truth is logically entailed by its truthmaker, since anything can entail a necessary truth, and it is propositions, not states of affairs, which necessitate entailments. Perhaps the truthmaking relation is primitive, but it is usually explored in terms of concepts such as 'grounding', 'determination', 'dependence', 'causation', 'part-whole', and 'explanation'. If propositions are abstracts objects existing independently of minds, each state of affairs will be making true a vast profusion of them. This seems a good reason to treat propositions as actual thoughts occurring in minds, but this means that the truthmaking relation is brought into existence by the mind, not by the state of affairs. The puzzling concept of mental 'intentionality' ('aboutness') seems to be an aspect of the truthmaking relation.

The most discussed problem case for truthmaking is '**negative existentials**' – true denials of a thing's existence, such as 'there are no snakes in Ireland'. If Ireland as it is makes the truth of this, the same truthmaker also makes the truth of every other negative existential about Ireland. The truth is about snakes, but the truthmaker isn't. If we say 'there are no pterodactyls' it is not even clear where to look for its truthmaker. We might respond by focusing on positive truthmakers. The hunt for the truthmaker of 'there are snakes in Ireland' has failed to produce anything, which is a very good reason not to believe it. However, most true propositions can be expressed as negative or positive sentences (as in 'there is an absence of snakes in Ireland'), so this is not a neat solution. We could just embrace negative truthmakers, perhaps as the minimum totality of states of affairs that will do the job. A more drastic response drops individual truthmakers, and just says that the sum of everything that exists is the sum of truthmaking for every possible positive or negative proposition (with the slogan 'truth supervenes on Being').