Truth-Makers
On the Sound Origins of a Confused Idea

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Introduction

The primary topic of this article are theories of truth-maker (for short: TM-theories). My main contentions are as follows:

(i) The central notion of TM-theories, i.e. the notion of a truth-maker, is still in need of clarification (section 1).
(ii) A proper understanding of the notion should not be based on modal notions, but on an explanatory notion introduced by the connector “because” (section 2); the relevant explanatory relation is conceptual in nature (section 3).
(iii) Once we understand the notion of a truth-maker properly, we shall see that the entities usually regarded as truth-makers cannot fulfil the intended job (section 4).

1. Truth-Makers & Making Something True

1.1 Truth-Makers

There is, some philosophers tell us, a certain important relation which can hold between objects of various sorts (facts, individual moments, sometimes substances) and truths. To be what they are, i.e. to be true, these philosophers urge, truths need the assistance of truth-makers – objects that do truths the favour of making them true. The objects which are usually taken to play the role of truth-makers fall in either of two categories: that of individual moments (comprising particularised properties like Socrates’ paleness, and events, like Little Voice’s singing), or that of facts.\(^1\) There could also be truth-makers of a different category; in particular, TM-theories may employ a categorically inhomogeneous stock of truth-makers, because certain essential predications about objects might be made true by the objects themselves (thus, for example, by substances) rather than by certain aspects of them.\(^2\) Nevertheless, individual moments or facts are essential ingredients of almost every TM-theory, without which the theory would collapse (losing them as truth-makers would deprive most contingent atomic statements of their truth-makers).

For sake of simplicity, I shall concentrate on the first of these potential classes of truth-makers, though what I have to say applies to the second class as well.

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\(^1\) Individual moments have been called a variety of names; nowadays the title “trope” may be most widespread (for an overview see Mulligan et al. 1984: 292f).

\(^2\) Cp. Mulligan et al. (1984: 300f.).
1.2 Truth-Makers and Necessitation

Most philosophers working on the idea of truth-making would agree that the concept of truth-making is intimately related to the notion of necessitation, which can be defined as follows:

\[(\text{Nec}) \quad x \text{ necessitates } p \iff \text{df. necessarily, if } x \text{ exists, then } p \text{ is true.}\]

Indeed, the two concepts are sometimes identified.\(^3\) Such an identification is harmless if the phrase “is a truth-maker of” is taken to be a merely stylistic variant of “necessitates” (which is defined as above).

But although the expression “truth-maker” is of recent coinage and a genuine term of the art, most philosophers who use it do not introduce it via an explicit definition that lends it a precise meaning. Rather, they rely on certain pre-theoretic intuitions about how to use the term and would treat the equation of necessitation and truth-making as a hypothesis to be tested against those intuitions. The intuitions in question stem, at least partly, from intuitions about the correct use of a somewhat less technical idiom (or group of idioms) with an established use in ordinary language. Thus, TM-theorists usually endorse the transition from statements involving the technical noun “truth-maker” to those that involve an inflection of the verbal phrase “to make something true”. Undoubtedly, many statements that TM-theorists are willing to formulate (and assert) in this latter jargon sound rather bizarre to laymen’s ears. That Jean’s singing makes it true that she is singing, that the apple’s redness makes it true that the apple is red, or that Jean makes it true that she is human are linguistic oddities by any ordinary standards. But nevertheless there are similar statements which sound rather familiar if uttered in ordinary contexts. We sometimes say that this or that made our dreams, hopes, predictions, or deepest fears come true. And it is admissible to omit the “come” in the idiom, as Oscar Wilde illustrated when he made Dorian Gray ask himself:

> Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what that soul thought, they realized? – that what it dreamed, they made true? (The Picture of Dorian Gray)

The objects to which we commonly ascribe the (enacted) power of making something true may well be substances; they can be atoms on a canvas, and they can also be rational agents. However, they can also be of the sort that TM-theorists favour as truth-makers, they can be events or particularised qualities. To wit, a wedding may make a dream come true, and a particular smile on the beloved’s face could equally do the job.

\(^3\) Cp. Fox 1987: 189.
Now we can formulate the following intuition that is partly constitutive of the meaning of “truth-maker” in the mouth of many philosophers:

(Int) A truth-maker of \( s \) is something which makes \( s \) true.

Judged from this intuition, the equation of necessitation and truth-making is a failure, which is a lesson to be drawn from the problem of unwelcome truth-makers. The problem is, in a nutshell, that for many a true statement there are entities whose existence ensures the truth of that statement, while nevertheless it seems to contradict the spirit of the idea of truth-making to countenance them as truth-makers of it.\(^4\)

The problem of unwelcome truth-makers is widely acknowledged with respect to necessary truths.\(^5\) If truth-making were none but necessitation, then every old object would qualify as a truth-maker of any necessary truth. Jean would thus be a truth-maker of the arithmetic truth that \( 5 + 6 \) equals 11. But this seems to be incompatible with the intuitions mobilised by proponents of truth-maker theories.

It is less often recognised, however, that the problem of unwelcome truth-makers also arises with regard to certain contingent truths. Take, for example the statement:

(1) Jean is singing.

A proper truth-maker of (1) would be Jean’s singing. But if truth-making is nothing but necessitation, there are apparently other truth-makers as well: for example my knowledge that Jean is singing, the beauty of her singing, my perception of her singing, and the singleton \{Jean’s singing\}.\(^6\) However, although these entities may well necessitate statement (1), it does not seem appropriate to hold that

(1\*) The beauty of Jean’s singing makes it true that Jean is singing,

or any of the variants that we get by replacing “the beauty of her singing” in (1\*) by “my perception of her singing”, “my knowledge that Jean is singing”, or “the singleton \{x\}” respectively.

So there can be entities which are necessitators of some statement but disqualify as truth-makers of it in light of the intuition expressed in (Int). That is a reason not to identify truth-making with necessitation. (That the cited cases really necessitate (1) hinges, of course, on some more or less controversial theses; I will not defend any particular of the relevant theses here – it is not necessary to do so. Whoever does not dismiss these

\(^4\) There is also the converse problem of missing truth-makers which arises for certain contingent truths and which would deserve discussion; but for lack of space, I concentrate on the abovementioned problem.


\(^6\) Barry Smith (1999: 278) offers two similar examples of unwelcome truth-makers; one involves God’s verdicts, the other second-order tropes.
claims out of hand, has some reason to be bothered by the threat of the problem of un-welcome truth-makers.\(^7\)

A philosopher who acknowledges the problem above has at least two options: either (i) she denies the equation of truth-making and necessitation but holds that necessitation nevertheless plays some role in explicating the notion of a truth-maker, such that truth-making will equal necessitation “plus X”,\(^8\) or (ii) she gives up the idea that necessitation has any role to play in the explication of truth-making and seeks for a different approach.

I think the second option is to be chosen, and I will present an account along that lines in what follows. Its naturalness, I hope, will speak in its favour – for reasons of space, I cannot enter into a detailed discussion of alternative options here.

2. An Explication of the Concepts

2.1 The Ordinary Notion of Making Something True

I shall now propound an explication of the ordinary notion of something (or someone) making something true. My proposal will carry over straightforwardly to an explication of the notion of a truth-maker.

It seems to be a widespread, though often implicit, contention that we should in the end rely on modal notions for an analysis of notions such as to make something true, truth-maker etc. This attitude can perhaps best be understood before the background of the immense interest and developments in modal logics during the last decades. But modal notions, I reckon, cannot pick out the right conditions of relevancy in which something must stand to a truth if it is to be responsible for the truth’s being true – if it is to make it true. And a better approach is easily found; something counts, intuitively, only as making some proposition \(p\) true, if \(p\) is true because of some of her (or its) conduct. I propose to take this as the analysis wanted:

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(TM) \quad x \text{ makes } p \text{ true } \leftrightarrow_{df} \text{ } x \text{ does something, such that because } x \text{ does it, } p \text{ is true}.\]

\(^7\) Let me just briefly mention some relevant theses: (i) Perception is an informational state individuated via its causal origin (cp. Evans 1982: 122-129). (ii) Knowledge is a factive state (Williamson 2000: ch. 2) and no particular piece of knowledge could have been a mere belief (notice that Williamson hesitates to apply his thesis to token states because of some general worries about the idea of such entities; op. cit. 40). (iii) Tropes are dependent upon their bearers (cp. Mulligan et. al. 1984: 294). (iv) The singleton \(\{x\}\) depends on \(x\) (cp. Fine 1995: 271).

\(^8\) For this strategy, cp. Smith 1999: 282.

\(^9\) In Schnieder (2004a & 2004b) I propose an analogous explication for a notion that plays a pivotal role in a different philosophical debate: for the formulation of his Consequence Argument, Peter van Inwagen (1983: 68ff.) relies on the idiom “someone is able to render something false”. In the literature on this argument, several proposals were made how to understand the idiom. All of them are based on modal terms and suffer from problems which are structurally similar to the problem of un-welcome
A short reflection tells us that the phrase “to make something true” exhibits some interesting complexity, for we often say of some people that they make other things such and such – and most often it is not truth, which they bestow upon other things. We can make things or persons happy, famous, hot, sick, etc. Now the idea behind (TM) gives rise to a general account of a whole variety of notions of making something such-and-such:

\[(M) \ x \ makes \ y \ \leftrightarrow_{\text{df.}} \ x \ does \ something, \ such \ that \ because \ x \ does \ it, \ y \ is \ F.\]

Since the “do something”, which has a quantificational function here, tends to stand only for verbs (and only for verbs of some particular sort), one could arguably expand the notion yet further, by substituting a “does or is” for the “does”. An author may be made famous by his widely illegible compositions. Then he will not be famous because of something that his texts do (on a natural reading of “do”), but rather because of something that they are; to wit, widely illegible. Using the symbolic “\(\exists F. \ F(x)\)” as an abbreviation of “there is something which \(x\) is or does”, we can get the following more general scheme of which (M) is a slightly restricted version:

\[(M^*) \ x \ makes \ y \ \leftrightarrow_{\text{df.}} \ \exists G (y \ is \ F \ because \ G(x)).\]

2.2 The Application to Truth-makers

Now for the notion of a truth-maker. One thing is clear from nearly every exposition and defence of TM-theories: what should be relevant to some thing’s being a truth-maker of a given proposition, is the thing’s existence.

What remains at stake is how to spell out the relation between a thing’s existence and a proposition’s truth which justifies calling the thing a truth-maker of the proposition. If the notion of a truth-maker is linked to the ordinary notion of making something true in the way expressed by \((\text{Int})\), then the relation in question should not be spelled out in modal terms, but rather in explanatory terms. A straightforward account is the result:

\[(TM) \ x \ is \ a \ truth-maker \ of \ p \ \leftrightarrow_{\text{df.}} \ p \ is \ true, \ because \ x \ exists.\]

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10 This reading of “\(\exists F. \ (Fx)\)” was suggested by Prior (1970: 36). Like Prior, I sympathise with an innocuous interpretation of non-nominal quantifiers, such as “something”, standing in the position of a general term. That is, I take them to be neither objectual nor substitutional (for a detailed defence of this position see Rayo & Yablo 2001). However, nothing in the present context particularly hinges on this view.
The problem of unwelcome truth-makers is overcome, once we accept (TM). While my knowledge that Anna is singing may necessitate that she is singing, it is certainly not true that she is singing because I know she is. Similarly, it is not because the beauty of her singing exists that it is true that she is singing, nor because the singleton of her singing exists, etc. We also get the right result in the case of necessary truths, since it is not because Anna’s singing exists that 2 plus 2 equals 4 and so on.

Incidentally, proponents of TM-theories often use formulations which come very close to my proposal in their informal characterisations of truth-making. A truth-maker, it is often said, is that in virtue of which a truth is true – but the phrase “in virtue of” seems to be simply a variant of the idiom “because of”. So if I am right, these TM-theorists are blind to what they have got before them. They had reached their goal before they even consciously started.

3. The Connective “Because”

3.1 Causal and Non-Causal Explanations

One might object to my analysis because of its employment of an obscure term, the sentential connective “because”. One should not do so, I maintain. At least, no competent user of the connective “because” should do it. Of course one might find an inquiry into the conceptual content of this connective wanting and useful. But one should not, at the outset of such an enquiry, condemn the use of the word as long as no proper analysis has been found. After all, philosophers made use of modal notions long before the heyday of modal logics, and even now disputes about such notions still continue. Furthermore, one should allow for the possibility that “because” is a primitive operator whose conceptual content does not allow for any reductive analysis. Indeed, I reckon that this is the case (though I cannot prove it – it is rarely possible to literally prove the primitive-ness of a notion). But primitiveness of a notion only debar[s] it from enjoying some kind of explicit analysis – still it might be illuminated by pointing out conceptual connections, implications, etc. I shall now try to shed some light on the notion of because (but this whole section has to remain somewhat sketchy).

By using the connective “because” we enter the field of explanation. Now there are some very general distinctions to make between different notions of explanation. By an explanation we may understand an act of explaining or rather a piece of information possibly conveyed in such an act. I shall stick with the latter meaning of the word here and furthermore equate information in the relevant sense with propositions. Linguistic vehicles which express such propositions are in particular sentences of the form “p because q”. (Of course, these are not the only linguistic forms of explanation; we have a whole battery of expressions introducing explanatory contexts. The idioms “in virtue

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11 Such characterisations can be found, for example, in Armstrong (1997: 88), Bigelow (1988: 125), Mulligan et. al. (1984: 287), and Simons (1992: 159).

of”, “by”, “constitute”, “is the ground of / is grounded in” are, for instance, often used for this purpose.) I shall call the propositions expressed by the sentential component “p” of such a sentence the explanandum and the component “q” the explanans, and say that the latter explains the former, if the whole statement is true (otherwise, the explanans only purportedly explains the explanandum). An explanation then is a complex proposition in which one propositional component purportedly (and perhaps actually) explains another. This notion of an explanation still allows for several explanations with the same explanandum, since explanations may well be partial. But I presuppose that it is an objective matter whether a proposition explains another (a presumption I cannot defend here in detail). Finally, I shall expand my usage of “explanation”, “explanans”, etc. slightly, such as to cover not only the propositions expressed by such sentences, but sometimes the sentences themselves.

Among objective explanations we may now distinguish different types. First of all, there are causal explanations, such as

(1) The tree fell because de Selby hit it with an axe.

However, it is important to notice that not all explanation is causal. Indeed, the bulk of explanations given in philosophy and mathematics is of a different type. Let us take a look at some very simple examples here (which are, in itself, not of any particularly philosophical – let alone mathematical – interest).13

(2) Thorsten is my brother-in-law, because he is married to my sister.
(3) Xanthippe became a widow, because Socrates died.
(4) This vase is coloured because it is red.

These explanations can all be called conceptual. They are based on certain conceptual relations which they in turn illuminate. Such relations can be of different character, as a brief run through the examples will show. In (2) and (3), the explanation settles on the appropriate conceptual analyses of the explananda’s central notions, the concept of a brother-in-law and the concept of a widow. By a brother-in-law of someone we just mean the husband of a sister of this person, and by a widow we just mean a woman whose husband has died. But in the case of (4) a different mechanism is at work; we cannot analyse the concept expressed by the general term “colour” in terms of concepts of individual colours like red, yellow, blue etc.14 Nevertheless, it is a conceptual truth that red, blue etc. are colours. And furthermore, mastery of the concept expressed by “colour” requires a thinker to master at least some colour concepts and to know that these concepts stand for colours. Another example of a conceptual explanation not (at least not solely) based on conceptual analysis might be

13 Jaegwon Kim (1973, 1974) has influentially drawn attention to examples of such kind.
14 W. E. Johnson (1921: ch. 11) pointed out the peculiarity of the relation between what he called determinables and determinates by using the example of colours.
(5) There cannot be any round squares, because the concept of a round square is contradictory.

An important feature of explanation is its internal order; explanations are in generally asymmetric. The factors which determine the correct direction of an explanation will be different with causal and in conceptual explanations: in the first case the order of explanation is ruled by the order of the causal relation itself (which again might be in some ways connected to the order of time). The direction of conceptual explanations seems to be owed to factors of conceptual complexity and primitiveness; in general, statements involving complex or elaborated concepts are explained in recourse to more primitive concepts (which may or may not enter into an analysis of the complex concepts).

Notice that an explanation can involve both conceptual and causal components at the same time, as for example

(6) Xanthippe became a widow, because Socrates drank the cup of hemlock.

The truth of (6) is grounded in the truth of the following chain of explanations (and the fact that “because” is, by and large, a transitive connector):

(7) Xanthippe became a widow, because Socrates died. Socrates died, because he drank the cup of hemlock.

The first explanation in (7) is conceptual, while the second is causal.

3.2 Truth

A conceptual explanation particularly interesting for our present concerns was seen and stressed by Aristotle, when he wrote:

It is not because we think that you are white, that you are white, but because you are white we who say this have the truth. ¹⁵

Aristotle seems to claim that the following is true (while its converse is false):

(8) It is true that snow is white, because snow is white.

Aristotle’s insight can be generalised with the following theorem:

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\[\forall p: \text{If it is true that } p \text{ at all, then it is true that } p, \text{ because } p.\]

Principle (T) exploits a crucial part of our understanding of the concept of truth. As Tarski had put it, it is a condition of adequacy to imply all instances of the well-known schema:

(Tarski) \quad \text{It is true that } p \leftrightarrow p.

This schema lies at the heart of the concept of truth: it is constitutive of our mastery of this concept to accept instances of (Tarski). This fact about the concept of truth gives rise to the correctness of (T) and its instances. The explanatory force of (T) is comparable to that in the examples of conceptual explanations discussed so far; it is an explanation of a proposition employing a logically elaborate concept, the concept expressed by “true”, by a conceptually simpler proposition. This latter proposition does not employ concepts which enter into an analysis of the concept expressed by “true”; truth is not analysable in terms of the concepts expressed by “white” and “snow”, because someone can have a grasp of the concept of truth without knowing anything about snow or the colour white. But mastery of the concept is constituted by the ability to relate statements involving it to statements involving only conceptual resources already at hand. This claim, and thus (T), can be agreed upon by proponents of quite different theories of truth (I shall not enter into the debate about which theory of truth is correct here; but I presuppose that an adequate theory should not only validate (Tarski), but also do justice to (T)).

Given (T) and a basic understanding of how its correctness comes about, I shall now return to the analysis of the notions of making something true which I proposed. As I said, I cannot offer any reductive analysis of the involved concept expressed by “because”; but still we are in a better position to understand the mechanisms of the analysis now. If my analysis is correct, then to claim that something makes something true, is to

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16 The variables in this formula do not stand in the position of a singular term but rather in sentence position. They could be given a substitutional reading, which would, however, limit the generality of the formula due to the language-dependence of substitutional quantification. Alternatively, one could opt for a third kind of quantification, non-objectual quantification into sentence (or general term) position which is not substitutional (on these issues see Simons 1997, Williamson 1999: 259–263, and the texts by Prior and Rayo & Yablo that I mentioned earlier).
17 Some instances of (Tarski) are problematic due to the semantical antinomies.
18 This claim is compatible with the view that the concept of truth allows for an explicit analysis (for a recent proposal which defends such a view and explicitly endorses (T) see Künne 2003: 333–339), but also with the view that no such analysis is to be found (Horwich, for instance, tries to justify (T) on the basis of his minimal theory of truth; cp. Horwich 1998: 104f.).
19 Presumably, not every conception of truth will do. Whoever thinks that the concept of truth is strictly redundant, such that “it is true that \( p \)” and “\( p \)” express the same proposition, will have problems accepting (T), since she will not be able to see any conceptual difference between the explanans and the explanandum (cp. Anscombe 2000: 4f.).
assert a certain explanatory relation. The force of this relation will, in the most basic cases, simply reduce to the conceptual explanation given in (T): I raise my arm; by (T) it follows that it is true that I do it, because I do it. So, according to my analysis I render it true that I raise my arm.

But in most cases, the conceptual explanation given in (T) will only contribute to the relevant explanatory relation which will be more complex and might involve some causal explanations. Imagine I raise my arm, causing a glass to fall over. So, because I raise my arm, the glass falls, and because it falls, it is true that the glass falls, and my analysis yields the desired result that I make it true that the glass falls. In the two-step explanation I gave, the first “because” relies on a causal explanation, the second again on (T).

In other cases, a further conceptual explanation may work together with the one given in (T); a woman’s mother wishes to become a granny. Now if her daughter gives birth to a child, then because she does so, her mother becomes a granny, and because she becomes one, it is true that she does. So, by giving birth to her child, the daughter makes her mother’s wish come true.

With these remarks I shall end my discussion of the connective “because” for now; obviously, there is still a lot of ground to be covered. Especially the mechanisms of conceptual explanations are hardly explored in the vast amount of literature on explanation in science, since the relevant literature unsurprisingly is particularly engaged in discussions of causal explanations. However, a theory of conceptual explanation is highly desirable. It will not only be important for several philosophical issues (such as the issue of truth-making), but it will also contribute to an understanding of what explanations in philosophy may consist in.

4. An Argument Against TM-Theories

Hitherto I have argued for a certain understanding of the notion of a truth-maker. Insofar, my contribution to the debate has been a positive one. But now, I shall finally develop an argument to the effect that TM-theories are a result of some capital philosophical mistake; they implicitly rely on a false explanatory claim, the converse of which is actually true. Thus, they reverse the correct order of explanation.

For the following I need a simple example of an atomic truth; let us use

(S) Socrates is pale.

What should qualify as a truth-maker for (S) is Socrates’ paleness, a particularised quality. If my analysis of the notion of truth-making is correct, then Socrates’ paleness is a truth-maker of (S) if, but only if, the following holds:

(?S) It is true that Socrates is pale because Socrates’ paleness exists.
One thing should be, I take it, beyond dispute: it is far from evident that (?S) really expresses a true explanation. Nevertheless, it might.

As we have seen, however, there is another correct explanation with the same explanandum as that of (?S):

(S-T)  It is true that Socrates is pale because Socrates is pale.

This is just an instance of principle (T). Now, if (?S) is an equally correct explanation with the same explanans, we should expect their explanantia to be explanatorily related themselves. Since it seems that (S-T) is in some sense the most direct explanation with respect to its explanandum, the explanans of (?S) should explain the explanans of (S-T), if (?S) is correct. In other words, if (S-T) is correct, then the following statement should be true:

(S-1)  Socrates is pale, because Socrates’ paleness exists.

Is it true? That is a hard question; I confess that I lack any stable intuitions here, just as I do in the converse case:

(S-2)  Socrates’ paleness exists, because Socrates is pale.

At least we may expect, for a start, that at most one of these purported explanations is true – explanation is asymmetric. But is there a principled way of deciding which, if any, of them really deserves the title of an explanation? I shall now argue that there is a way, and that it leads to the acceptance of (S-2), and so to the rejection of (S-1).

Let us take a look at the phrase which brings the particularised property in (S-1) and (S-2) into play, the designator “Socrates’ paleness”. It can be called a canonical designator of a particularised property; it has the standard form of such designators, combining an expression capable of designating a property with a designator of a subject which possesses the property in question – other examples would be “Little Voice’s singing”, “Jean’s piety”, or “Belmondo’s charm”. Most often, when the idea of a particularised property is introduced by friends of such entities, it is by the use of such terms. And this is not an accident; these designators are central to our acquisition of the conceptual framework of particularised properties. It is by certain linguistic contexts which contain such designators and which resist a reading of them as denoting shareable properties that we are driven towards the acceptance of this framework.20

Canonical designators of particularised properties, such as “Socrates’ paleness”, are semantically complex expressions, whose meaning is a function of the meaning of their

20  The strongest arguments for the acceptance of tropes rely on their role in causal contexts (see for instance Campbell 1981: section 3), and in particular on their role in contexts of perception (see Mulligan et al. 1984: 304-308).
parts and their way of combining. Mastery of the rules that govern the formation of such expressions will give rise to an understanding of any combination of a property term, such as “paleness”, with an arbitrary singular term, such as “Socrates”, as long as the terms combined are understood. But this is just to say that such a canonical designator of a trope expresses a logically complex concept, the grasp of which requires us to relate it to the concepts expressed by the phrase’s components, which will be conceptually more primitive. Thus we understand “Socrates’ paleness” along the following line: it denotes a particular instance of paleness, existing as a feature of Socrates just in case that he is pale. Generally, we understand an expression of the form “$x$’s $F$-ness” to denote a particular instance of $F$-ness, existing as a feature of $x$ just in case that $x$ is $F$.

So we see that it is part of our understanding of “Socrates’ paleness” that it denotes an entity that exists if Socrates is pale. Now notice that the sentence in italics is exactly the purported explanans in (S-2). Here we encounter a conceptual structure we have met before; the explanans employs certain concepts which build the layer for the more elaborate concepts employed in the explanandum. But such a kind of structure we have acknowledged before as giving rise to a conceptual explanation – Thorsten is my brother-in-law, because he is married to my sister; Xanthippe became a widow, because Socrates died. And Socrates’ paleness exists, because Socrates is pale. This way we can justify the explanatory relation holding in (S-2); accordingly, (S-2) is explanatory.

But then, on the other hand, (S-1) is not. It presupposes an explanatory relation, where there is none. No causal and no conceptual explanation is given with it; the conceptual explanation which one might deem it to give would invoke logically complex concepts for an explanation of their more primitive components. But this is to turn things upside down; accordingly I conclude that (S-1) is nothing but a pseudo-explanation. Socrates’ paleness does not do much; in particular, it does not make it true that Socrates is pale.

Now Socrates and his paleness were arbitrarily chosen examples; what I have said about them can, mutatis mutandis, also be said about LV’s singing, Belmondo’s charm or Jean’s piety. It can be said about all the standard cases of purposed truth-makers for atomic statements; they are denoted by logically complex expressions which are understood on the basis of our understanding the components of the atomic statements. But because of that, they cannot be invoked for a conceptual explanation which would have to hold for them to be truth-makers. So they are none. TM-theories worked with a central notion which was never made sufficiently clear by their proponents. After clarifying it, we can see, however, that TM-theory is in need of some explanatory relation holding in a direction where no such relation holds. TM-theorists have drawn a blank.

I conclude this section with some kind of a concession: one may regard my argument against TM-theories as a challenge rather than a defeat. The challenge is twofold. Given

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22 This involves a slight simplification, since I abstract from the factor of time; under certain circumstances, we might be willing to distinguish between several instances of paleness belonging to Socrates. While this would complicate matters slightly, it would not affect my main thesis.
that my analysis of truth-making is correct, TM-theorists can be required to tell us *firstly* what explanatory relation could justify the truth of the explanations they need for their theory to work, explanations such as (S-1). And *secondly* they should either undermine the conceptual explanation I tried to establish with respect to (S-2), or explain how it can be that in this special case, we have an explanation running in both directions. As long as this challenge is not met (and I doubt it could ever be met), we can and should be sceptical of the legacy of TM-theories.

**References**


