

Jago’s latest monograph argues for the following key thesis: The property *Being true* is identical to the property *Having a truthmaker*. The book splits into four parts.

Part I covers the nature of truth. Jago argues for a univocal theory of substantial truth, arguing against deflationism and pluralism. The meat of this part is in favour of orthodox truthmaking theory. Orthodoxy goes beyond saying that what is true depends on what the world’s like; orthodoxy further says that every true proposition stands in a ‘truthmaking’ relation to a state of affairs (and that every such state of affairs necessitates that relation). As Jago notes, whilst there’s a surfeit of orthodox truthmaker theorists there’s a dearth of arguments for orthodox truthmaking. His contribution to the debate, then, is an excellent addition to the bank of, otherwise scarce, arguments.

In favour of there being a truthmaking relation, with states of affairs as relata, Jago starts by arguing that, since we routinely quantify over states of affairs, they exist. He adds that: (i) true propositions about something existing are made true by that something (thus, for every state of affairs s, s is a truthmaker for the proposition ⟨s exists⟩); and (ii) a proposition ⟨Fa⟩ just is the proposition ⟨The state of affairs [a is F] exists⟩. Given (i) and (ii), the state of affairs [a is F] is a truthmaker for ⟨Fa⟩ (and it’s pretty clearly a relation between the state and the proposition). The argument is interesting. One thing to note is that Jago’s line on ontological commitment leaves open that the things we unavoidably quantify over (i.e. states of affairs), whilst they exist, don’t *fundamentally* exist. Indeed, I think that nowadays many of those allied to this theory of ontological commitment—which includes some existing truthmaker theorists—would say exactly that. So it’s worth considering a reality which, at a fundamental level, doesn’t include states of affairs but is instead (say) fundamentally nominalist. The resulting theory would be compatible with everything Jago says but be a poorer fit with the traditional trappings of truthmaking theory. For instance, we’d no longer be able to rely on truthmaking as a guide to what fundamentally exists. Admittedly, regarding Jago’s own project, it seems less of a problem; Jago might be *fine* saying that what he details concerns only derivative reality, and press on regardless. Indeed, some things probably become easier! Now negative states of affairs, which Jago later relies on, become significantly less repugnant—that negative states of affairs *derivatively* exist is a belief I think many would sign up to.

Jago also recouches his 2012 *Mind* article in favour of truthmaker maximalism (the view that *every* true proposition has a truthmaker), including rejoinders to responses to the earlier article. So says Jago, non-maximalist truthmaker theorists will accept (at least) two types of proposition, those requiring a truthmaker (presumably ‘positive’ propositions saying how reality *is*) and those which don’t (‘negative’ propositions saying how reality *isn’t*). Some propositions may be a mix (e.g. disjunctions of the two types), which—if true—are only true derivatively, in virtue of a mix of positive and negative propositions being true. Jago then considers propositions like ⟨Bob knows John doesn’t have a sister⟩. Intuitively it’s not a negative proposition (and Jago backs that up with a solid argument). But it can’t be a positive proposition because then, were it true, there’d exist a truthmaker for it. Truthmakers necessitate the truth of the propositions they make true and so (because knowledge is factive) that truthmaker would necessitate the non-existence of John’s sister. But truthmakers which
necessitate the non-existence of things are meant to be weird truthmakers (‘absences’ or ‘negative facts’) that non-maximalists are actively meant to be avoiding! Thus (Bob knows John doesn’t have a sister) must be a derivative proposition. Says Jago, if it’s derivative then there must be some propositions it’s derivative of, and it’s now incumbent upon the non-maximalist to say exactly what those propositions are. But if you sketch out what those propositions are, you’d end up solving the Gettier problem for knowledge cases. And since no-one claims to be able to solve the Gettier cases, no-one can carry out the enterprise of explaining which facts (Bob knows John doesn’t have a sister) being true is derivative of. So it can’t be derivative, negative, or positive, and the non-maximalist has a problem.

I worry that this doesn’t work. Gettier shows that there’s some further condition we must meet in order for true justified beliefs to be knowledge. Whilst I’ve no idea what that condition is, it seems an unfair demand to say that the non-maximalist has to figure it out themselves. I don’t see why they can’t simply say that (Bob knows John doesn’t have a sister) is derivative of the true proposition capturing that condition, even though they’re ignorant of what, exactly, it is. (Bob knows John doesn’t have a sister) would be ‘idiopathic’, derivative of unknown propositions (which we may, if we ever solve the Gettier cases, come to know). Nevertheless, whatever qualms you might have, Jago is correct that there’s a paucity of arguments for truthmaker theory and this book is a great move towards remedying that.

Once Jago has truthmaker theory in place, he argues that his main thesis—the identity of Being true with Having a truthmaker—is correct because it serviceably explains various platitudes about truth. For instance, it straightforwardly explains (A) is true iff A’. And it also explains why truths depend upon the way the world is, just as long as we assume that truthmaking is a dependency relation. (Though, were truthmaking a merely derivative matter, as I above suggested was compatible with what Jago says, then it becomes less clear that truthmaking ends up being a relation of metaphysical dependence.)

Part II of the book continues the metaphysical discussion, covering the nature of the truthmakers themselves. Having settled on them being states of affairs, Jago dedicates a chapter to discussing their nature. He discusses three options: an Armstrongian-style theory, a primitivist account, and a mereological account. He (rather reasonably) doesn’t settle on a chosen account, instead sketching the pros and cons of each view. He then moves to discussing the perennial bugbear for truthmaking: How to handle truthmakers for non-existent facts. He argues for negative states of affairs playing the relevant role. Jago argues that negative states of affairs aren’t as abhorrent as everyone makes out. One motivation is that they play a causal role in that we can perceive them. My knowledge of the relevant literature is not thoroughgoing, but I’m not sure that Jago adds much to the existing case for that claim—certainly, I wasn’t left more convinced than I was beforehand that I can feel the absence of hippos around me. But the second part of his defense—that the metaphysical nature of states of affairs leaves room for negative states of affairs—is a significant addition.

Jago explains how someone who accepts states of affairs can easily make room for negative states of affairs. For instance, imagine you believe states of affairs are properties connected to particulars by a primitive ‘tie’ e.g. that the state of affairs of me being human is just a case of me being tied to Being a human. Given that one is mute about the nature of that tie, there’s little reason not to include a second primitive, ‘anti-tying’, such that negative states of affairs are properties anti-tied to particulars e.g. I am anti-tied to Being a panda and thus there’s a negative state of affairs of me not being a panda.
Part III delves into the nature of truthmaking and its logic. What is the truthmaking relation’s connections to necessity? Or grounding? What, exactly, is its logic? For instance, does the truthmaker for a conjunction make true one of its conjuncts? And if something makes true a proposition, does it also make true what it entails? Jago offers a thorough discussion, exhaustively delivering a systematic approach to truthmaking.

Part IV discusses the nature of propositions and the Liar Paradox. Rather than identifying propositions with sets of worlds, Jago identifies them with truthmaker conditions. These conditions get identified with the set of everything which could be a truthmaker for the relevant proposition. That much sounds solid, but I get lost on some of the details after that. This identification means we’ll need merely possible states of affairs for, e.g., the proposition ⟨Nikk Effingham is Prime Minister⟩ must have the state of affairs [Nikk Effingham is Prime Minister] as a member—a state of affairs which, probably thankfully, doesn’t exist. Jago says that we should include ersatz states of affairs, which he identifies with the ‘natures’ of states of affairs. I admit to being a bit murky on the details of how this is meant to work. Jago sketches one possibility for those who think states of affairs involve fundamental ties. Vis-à-vis obtaining states of affairs, they involve some particulars, the xs, some properties, the ys, and those things are all tied together. Vis-à-vis merely possible states of affairs, they’re the natures of various particulars and properties tied together, not by the primitive tying relation, but by the nature of the primitive tying relation. But isn’t the fundamental tie more an item of ideology than ontology? And, if so, how can it have a nature in the same way that particulars and properties do? And why think that its nature can tie just because it can tie? Nonetheless, setting aside such details, the idea of propositions as truthmaker conditions sounds prima facie plausible; I am sure you will find it illuminating to read about.

Finally, Jago ends with a discussion of the Liar Paradox. Having furnished us with an understanding of truth, propositions, etc. Jago takes everything he’s detailed and then deploys it to solve the Paradox. The solution is to say that there are no propositions corresponding to the liar sentences; liar sentences don’t actually say anything. There’s a deft demonstration of how Jago’s prequel bears out that reading.

Jago’s book is an excellent addition to (amongst other areas) truthmaking, metaphysics, and the philosophy of contradictions. No interested reader will come away disappointed. It’s all sterling stuff. The arguments are well thought out, well detailed, well argued, and—in short—unremittingly add to the quality of the debate in this area.