Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the "Grounding Objection"

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SUMMARY

The so-called "grounding objection" is the most commonly raised misgiving which philosophers have to the doctrine of divine middle knowledge: how can counterfactuals of creaturely freedom be true when there is no ground of their truth? I hope to show that the theory of truth known as Truth-Maker Theory can help to shed considerable light on this objection, revealing just how difficult it is to formulate a compelling version of the objection. For it is far from evident that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom must have truth-makers or, if they must, that appropriate candidates for their truth-makers are not available.

MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE, TRUTH-MAKERS, AND THE "GROUNDING OBJECTION"

Thomas Flint has observed that the so–called "grounding objection" is in the minds of many philosophers "the principal obstacle" to endorsing the Molinist doctrine of divine middle knowledge. [1] I share Flint's impression. What is ironic about this situation is not merely the fact that the many Molinist responses to the grounding objection remain largely ignored or unrefuted in the literature, nor yet again the fact that Molinist solutions to the objection tend to be far more sophisticated philosophically than the almost casual statements of the objection itself; rather the irony is that this allegedly powerful objection has virtually never been articulated or defended in any depth by its advocates. Contrary to Flint's claim that the objection "is as easy to state as it is difficult fully to resolve," [2] I hope to show that this objection is far from easy to state adequately—we shall see that Flint's own formulation is inadequate—and far from easy to defend.

No anti–Molinist has, to my knowledge, yet responded to Alvin Plantinga's simple retort to the grounding objection: "It seems to me much clearer that some counterfactuals of freedom are at least possibly true than that the truth of propositions must, in general, be grounded in this way." [3] What Plantinga understands—and grounding objectors apparently by and large do not—is that behind the grounding objection lies a theory about the relationship of truth and reality which needs to be articulated, defended, and then applied to counterfactuals of freedom if the grounding objection is to carry any probative force. Anti–Molinists have not even begun to address these issues.

What is the grounding objection? It is the claim that there are no true counterfactuals concerning

what creatures would freely do under certain specified circumstances–the propositions expressed by such counterfactual sentences are said either to have no truth value or to be uniformly false–, since there is nothing to make these counterfactuals true. Because they are contrary–to–fact conditionals and are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree, there is no ground of the truth of such counterfactual propositions. Thus, they cannot be known by God.

Warrant for the Molinist Assumption

Before scrutinizing this objection, it deserves to be underlined just how radical a claim it makes. It asserts that there are no true counterfactuals about how creatures would freely act under any given set of circumstances. This assertion is no mere ostensibly *undercutting* defeater of Molinism, but a putatively *rebutting* defeater. It makes a bold and positive assertion and therefore requires warrant in excess of that which attends the Molinist assumption that there are true counterfactuals about creaturely free actions. And the warrant for the Molinist belief that there are such truths is not at all inconsiderable: *First*, we ourselves often appear to know such true counterfactuals. Very little reflection is required to reveal how pervasive and indispensable a role such counterfactuals play in rational conduct and planning. We not infrequently base our very lives upon the assumption of their truth or falsity. *Second,* it is plausible that the Law of Conditional Excluded Middle (LCEM) holds for counterfactuals of a certain special form, usually called "counterfactuals of creaturely freedom." Counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are counterfactuals of the form *If* S *were in* C*,* S *would freely do* A, where *S* is a created agent, *A* is some action, and *C* is a set of fully specified circumstances including the whole history of the world up until the time of *S*'s free action. According to LCEM for any counterfactual *p* ™ *Õ q*, (*p* ™ *Õ q*) v (*p* ™ *Õ Ø q*). Molinists need not and should not endorse LCEM unqualifiedly.. There is no reason to think, for example, that if Suarez were to have scratched his head on June 8, 1582, then either Freddoso would have scratched his head on June 8, 1982 or would not have scratched his head on June 8, 1982. But it is plausible that counterfactuals of the very specialized sort we are considering must be either true or false. For since the circumstances *C* in which the free agent is placed are fully specified in the counterfactual's antecedent, it seems that if the agent were placed in *C* and left free with respect to action *A*, then he must either do *A* or not do *A*. For what other alternative is there? [4] *Third,* the Scriptures are replete with counterfactual statements, so that the Christian theist, at least, should be committed to the truth of certain counterfactuals about free, creaturely actions. The Church has never, until the modern age, doubted that God possesses knowledge of true counterfactuals concerning free, creaturely decisions; the whole dispute focused on whether He possessed that knowledge logically prior to the divine creative decree or only posterior to the divine decree. The Church's confidence that God knows such truths is rooted in the Scriptures themselves. To pick but one example, Paul, in reflecting upon God's eternal salvific plan realized in Christ, asserts,

"None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2.8). By "the rulers of this age" Paul means either the Jewish and Roman authorities such as Herod and Pilate who were the historical agents who instigated or carried out the crucifixion (cf. Acts 4. 27–28) or, more plausibly, the spiritual principalities and powers who rule "this present evil age" (Gal. 1. 4; cf. I Cor. 2. 6). In either case, we have here a counterfactual about creaturely free actions. So is Paul's assertion true or not? Will we have the temerity to say that Paul was wrong? Since the Church believes that Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these words, she accepts them as revealed truth from God. Thus, we have strong *prima facie* warrant for holding that there are true counterfactuals concerning what creatures would freely do under various circumstances.

In light of these considerations the grounding objector might retreat to the position that although there are now true counterfactuals about creaturely free acts, there are none logically prior to the divine creative decree. But then the grounding objector owes us a still more nuanced account of the grounding objection, since there seems to be no more ground now for many counterfactuals about creaturely free acts than there is logically prior to God's decree. Moreover, limiting the truth of such counterfactuals to a moment logically posterior to God's decree appears to make God the author of sin and to obliterate human freedom, since in that case it is God who decrees which counterfactuals about creaturely free acts are true, including counterfactuals concerning sinful human decisions. Thus, we have good reason for thinking that if such counterfactuals are now true or false, they must have been so logically prior to God's decree.

The point of these considerations is simply to underscore that the grounding objection, if it is to be successful, must, as a rebutting defeater, have more warrant than that enjoyed by the Molinist assumption that there are true counterfactuals concerning creaturely free actions. The Molinist is under no obligation to provide warrant for that assumption, since he is merely proposing a model which is intended as one possible solution to the alleged antinomy of divine sovereignty and human freedom. Nevertheless, if the model's detractors aim to defeat that solution by rebutting one of its elements, namely, the assumption that there are true counterfactuals about how creatures would freely behave under certain circumstances, then it is worth emphasizing the warrant that can be given for that assumption, since such warrant makes it all the more difficult to defeat that feature of the Molinist model.

The Grounding Objection and Truth–Maker Theory

So what can be said on behalf of the grounding objection? I have said that the grounding objection seems to assume a particular theory about the relationship of truth and reality. The theory presupposed by the grounding objection appears to be a certain construal or version of a view of

truth as correspondence which has come to be known as the theory of *truth–makers*. [5] During the realist revival in the early years of the twentieth century various philosophers turned their attention to the question of the ontology of truth. Logical Atomists such as Russell and Wittgenstein thought that in addition to truth–bearers, whether these be sentences, thoughts, propositions, or what have you, there must also be entities in virtue of which such sentences and/or propositions are true. Various names were employed for these entities, such as "facts" or "states of affairs." Among contemporary philosophers they have come to be known as "truth–makers."

A truth–maker is typically defined as *that in virtue of which a sentence and/or a proposition is true*. According to Peter Simons, "Truth–maker theory accepts the role of something which makes a proposition true, that is, whose existence suffices for the proposition to be true. But it does not automatically pronounce on the ontological category of the truth–maker." [6] "Indeed," he insists, "*anything whatever* is a truth–maker." [7] But historically the orthodox view has identified truth–makers with such abstract realities as facts or states of affairs–more often than not, the fact stated as a proposition's truth condition, as disclosed by the disquotation principle. Thus, what makes the statement "Al Plantinga is an avid rock–climber" true is the fact that *Al Plantinga is an avid rock–climber* or the state of affairs of *Al Plantinga's being an avid rock–climber.*

Now we immediately see the potentially misleading connotations of the term "truth–maker" for such entities. For *making* sounds like a causal relation between a truth–bearer and some concrete object, but truth–maker theorists are quite clear that the relation is by no means causal. An entity *a* **makes a proposition** *p* **true** if and only if that *a* exists entails that *p*. [8] That truth–makers are usually conceived to be such abstract entities as facts or states of affairs underlines the point that a causal relation is not at issue here.

That the relation between a truth–maker and a truth–bearer is not causal is especially evident if we require truth–makers for negative existential statements like "Baal does not exist." According to Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Not only Wittgenstein, but indeed almost all other philosophers who have investigated the relation of making true, have felt compelled in the face of the problems raised by negative propositions to adopt an ontology of truth makers as special, non–objectual entities having a complexity which is essentially logical." [9] Obviously a fact like Baal's non–existence, which is sufficient for the truth that Baal does not exist, is not a cause of anything.

A proper understanding of truth–makers, then, invalidates at once the crude construal of the grounding objection expressed in Robert Adams's statement of the problem and again in Alfred Freddoso's and Thomas Flint's respective formulations of the grounding objection:

Counterfactuals of freedom . . . are supposed to be contingent truths that are not caused to be true

by God. Who or what does cause them to be true? [10]

. . . metaphysically contingent propositions . . . require *causal* grounding in order to be true. That is, they must be *caused to be true* by some agent or agents, since it is not of their nature to be true.[11]

But if such conditionals are contingent, they might not have been true. Who, then, *makes* them true? Or, to phrase this question more carefully: Who or what actually *causes* the ones that are true to be true and the ones that are false to be false?

. . . neither God nor his free creatures cause counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to be true . . . . The conclusion that seems forced upon us, then, is that nobody actually causes the counterfactuals in question to be true. [12]

The truth–maker theorist would take it as understood that nobody actually causes counterfactuals or any other sort of proposition to be true. [13] The demand for a cause of a proposition's being true is inept, unless the anti–Molinist is presupposing some very special causal theory of truth–makers, in which case he owes us an articulation of that theory and a defense, not merely of its adequacy, but of its superiority to customary truth–maker theories.

It might be said that the demand for a cause of the truth of true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is a mere rhetorical flourish on the part of the anti–Molinist. But even if we give him the benefit of the doubt in this regard, the fact remains that the anti–Molinist still seems to be presupposing that in order to be true, counterfactuals of freedom must have truth–makers that either are or imply the existence of concrete objects. Not only does he owe us some explanation and justification for restricting truth–makers in this way, but such an assumption seems quite implausible. For we can think of other types of true propositions whose truth–makers neither are nor imply the existence of concrete objects. Consider, for example, the following statements:

1. No physical objects exist.

2. Dinosaurs are extinct today.

3. All ravens are black.

4. Torturing a child is wrong.

5. Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo.

6. The U. S. President in 2070 will be a woman.

7. If a rigid rod were placed in uniform motion through the aether, it would suffer a FitzGerald–Lorentz contraction.

Statement (1) could be true and statement (2) is true, yet they preclude truth–makers which are or imply the existence of the relevant concrete objects (such as dinosaurs). If such statements have truth–makers they would seem to be such things as the state of affairs of *there being no universe* or of *dinosaurs' no longer existing.* Some truth–maker theorists have maintained that such negative existential statements are true without having any truth–makers. For example, Mulligan, Simons, and Smith assert, "it seems more adequate to regard sentences of the given kind as true not in virtue of any truth maker of their own, but simply in virtue of the fact that the corresponding positive sentences have no truth maker." [14] But this assertion is self–contradictory. For a truth–maker is precisely that entity in virtue of which a sentence and/or proposition is true, and on their account a true, negative existential statement like "Baal does not exist" is true *in virtue of the fact* that the corresponding positive statement "Baal exists" lacks a truth–maker. Thus, this negative existential statement does have a truth–maker after all, namely, the fact that *"Baal exists" has dno truth–maker.* A similar problem seems to attend D. M. Armstrong's attempt to eliminate truth–makers for negative existential statements on the basis of the second–order state of affairs of there being all the first–order states of affairs there are. [15] Presumably the idea is that if the state of affairs described by the corresponding positive existential statement is not included in the second–order state of affairs cataloging all the first order states of affairs, then the negative statement is true without having a truth–maker. But, we may ask, is it not then the case that the negative statement is true in virtue of the fact that the relevant positive state of affairs is not included in the totality of states of affairs or in virtue of existence of the state of affairs of the positive state's not being so included?

A further difficulty for such accounts is that the want of a truth–maker for an affirmative existential statement or the absence of a positive state of affairs from a second–order state of affairs does not always seem to constitute plausible grounds for denying truth–makers to a negative statement. Take (2), for example. The want of a truth–maker for "Dinosaurs are alive today" or the absence of the relevant state of affairs from the totality of states does not seem to make it true that dinosaurs are extinct today. The same goes for "Dinosaurs are still alive today," for the negation of that sort of statement is notoriously ambiguous. The difficulty is that (2) seems to imply the positive assertion that dinosaurs were once alive and so needs more than just the lack of a truth–maker in order to be true. It seems to require as its truth–maker the fact that dinosaurs were once alive and now are not alive. In any case, even if negative existential statements are not made true in virtue of some fact or state of affairs, the anti–Molinist can hardly be encouraged by the prospect that we have here an exception to notion that true statements require truth–makers. If there can be true

statements without any truth–makers of those statements, how do we know that counterfactual statements cannot be true without truth–makers?

Statement (3) is a universally quantified statement which as such does not apply merely to any ravens which happen to exist. Therefore, it cannot be true just in virtue of existing ravens' being black, much less in virtue of the black ravens there are. Statement (4) is an ethical judgement which implies neither that children exist nor that any are ever actually tortured. It is hard to see how ethical and aesthetic judgements can be made true apart from ethical and aesthetic facts being among their truth–makers.

Statements (5) and (6) are tensed statements about persons who no longer or do not yet exist (at least on a dynamic theory of time [16]) and so cannot have such persons among their truth–makers. Truth–maker theorists have yet to grapple seriously with problems posed by tense and temporal becoming. But in a recent discussion Barry Smith offers two proposals: either we "need to introduce an explicit temporal dimension into our account of truthmaking, along the lines of: this liquid makes it true *at t* that it is odourless," or alternatively, we "might embrace a strictly presentist reading of '*x* makes it true that *p*'. Some true contingent past and future tense judgments will then be such that, while their truthmakers do not exist, they did or will exist." [17] These brief suggestions are merely programmatic; but the first seems to contemplate tenselessly existing truth–makers of tensed sentences along the lines of a static theory of time, [18] while the second appears to involve tensed truth–makers of tensed sentences such as might be postulated in a dynamic theory of time. [19] Smith's suggestion for this latter view is to assert that past– and future–tensed statements literally have (present–tense) no truth–makers, although they either did or will. This suggestion is problematic, however, because when the truth–maker of, say, a future–tense sentence like "Bush will be inaugurated as our forty–second President" becomes present, then that statement, far from being true, is false, and the corresponding present–tense statement, "Bush is being inaugurated as our forty–second President" is or becomes true. Thus, we should more plausibly say either that true past– and future–tense statements have no truth–makers at all, though their present–tense counterparts did or will have or that their truth–makers are the present–tense statements' having been or going to be true, or more simply the tensed facts stated as their tensed truth conditions, as disclosed by the disquotation principle. None of this is encouraging to the anti–Molinist, for again we find an important class of statements which either are true without having truth–makers or else have as their truth–makers abstractions like facts or states of affairs.

Finally, statement (7) is a true counterfactual about the aether of nineteenth century mechanics, which does not exist. One cannot say that the aether's properties serve as the truth–maker of (7), for the aether, being non–existent, has no properties. Of course, if the aether did exist, the aether would have properties, so perhaps one could say that what makes (7) true is the fact that in the

most similar possible worlds in which the antecedent is realized, the indicative version of the consequent has a truth–maker–but this would be of no comfort to anti–Molinists who presuppose that truth–makers must be or imply the existence of concrete objects.

All of the above types of truths are matters of vigorous discussion among truth–maker theorists. These illustrations and the controversies they engender underscore just how naïve an understanding grounding objectors generally have of the nature of truth–makers. The idea that the truth–makers of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom must be literal people or any sort of concrete object is extraordinary. [20]

Do Counterfactuals of Creaturely Freedom Need Truth–Makers?

Now, as I say, it is a matter of considerable debate whether true propositions do have truth–makers at all. Truth–maker theory is, after all, a minority position, associated in analytic philosophy with thinkers in the tradition of Logical Atomism. Simons admits that since Tarski's development of truth–theory without truth–makers, it has been widely held that there is "no need" for truth–makers, such as Russell and Wittgenstein advocated. [21] In a recent critique, Greg Restall demonstrates that given the customary axioms of truth–maker theory, it follows that every true proposition is made true by every truth–maker there is, so that, for example, *Grass is green* is made true by snow's being white. In a monumental understatement, Restall muses, "This is clearly not acceptable for any philosophically discriminating account of truthmakers." [22] Perhaps these difficulties in truth–maker theory can be ironed out; [23] but the point remains that the doctrine is controversial and cannot just be assumed to be true.

In any case many truth–maker theorists themselves reject the doctrine of *truth–maker maximalism*, [24] the doctrine that every true statement has a truth–maker. I have yet to encounter an argument for the conclusion that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom cannot be among those types of truths lacking a truth–maker. Indeed, when one reflects on the fact that such statements are *counter*factual in nature, then such statements might seem to be prime candidates for belonging to that diverse class of statements which are true without having any truth–makers. Truth–maker theory, which is still in its nascence, has not yet, to my knowledge, been applied to such counterfactuals. But the analogy with past– and future–tensed statements is suggestive. Freddoso has argued that just as future–tense statements or propositions are grounded in the fact that a relevant present–tense proposition will have grounds of its truth, so a counterfactual of creaturely freedom is grounded in the fact that a relevant indicative proposition would have grounds of its truth. He explains,

A realist about the absolute future will claim that there are *now* adequate metaphysical grounds for

the truth of a future–tense proposition *Fp* just in case there *will* be at some future time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present–tense counterpart *p* . . . .

But if this is so, then it seems reasonable to claim that there are now adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a conditional future contingent *F t (p) on H* just in case there would be adequate metaphysical grounds at *t* for the truth of the present–tense proposition *p* on the condition that *H* should obtain at *t*. [25]

On Freddoso's account, contingent propositions of the form *Fp* or *F t (p) on H* do have truth–makers, namely the fact or state of affairs that *p will have a truth–maker* or *p would have a truth–maker under the relevant condition* respectively.

In his analysis of Freddoso's view, Timothy O'Connor maintains that it would be more accurate simply to say that future contingent propositions have no grounds of their truth, but that they are true just in case their relevant present–tense counterparts will have grounds of their truth. [26] That is to say, propositions of the form *Fp* have *truth–conditions* which may be satisfied even though they lack *truth–makers.* This revision of Freddoso's view is along the lines of Barry Smith's second suggestion for dealing with future–tense statements. Analogously, O'Connor proposes, we should reinterpret Freddoso's truth–makers for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom as giving truth–conditions for propositions of the form *F t (p) on H*, while maintaining that such propositions do not have truth–makers. Although O'Connor, as an anti–Molinist, is none too happy about this analogy between future contingent propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, he grudgingly acknowledges its coherence and chooses to attack Molinism elsewhere. [27] But the point remains that it is far from obvious that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom have to have truth–makers in order to be true. Anti–Molinists have not even begun the task of showing that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are members of the set of propositions or statements which require truth–makers if they are to be true.

Do Counterfactuals of Creaturely Freedom Have Truth–Makers?

But suppose that future–tense statements and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do belong to that class of propositions or statements requiring truth–makers in order to be true. What is wrong with the facts or states of affairs proposed by Freddoso as the truth–makers of such propositions? O'Connor's declamation, "Freddoso's suggestion is just wrong, for there is not anything 'there' in the world which is its grounds" [28] reveals that he is presupposing the same naïve understanding of truth–makers exposed earlier. Facts or states of affairs such as Freddoso mentions routinely serve as perfectly respectable truth–makers. Perhaps one could try to exclude Freddoso's truth–makers by putting a nominalistic spin on facts and states of affairs, but the anti–Molinist can hardly

think that an objection based on so controversial a metaphysical thesis as that will have more warrant than the affirmation that there are true future tense statements and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

O'Connor also argues that Freddoso's view spawns a vicious infinite regress of grounds of truth. For a true future–tense proposition *Fp* is said to have grounds of its truth just in case there will be grounds of the truth of *p* at some future time. Here the grounds of the truth of *Fp* are stated by means of another statement which is also of the form *Fp*. We are off on an infinite regress, O'Connor insists, which is vicious because no statement has unconditional grounds of its truth. [29] But O'Connor has conflated the truth–maker of *Fp* with the truth–conditions of the statement that *Fp* has a truth–maker. On Freddoso's view the truth–maker of any proposition *Fp* is the fact that *there will be a truth–maker of p.* Facts do not themselves have truth–makers, so there is no regress.

Nevertheless, O'Connor's objection is helpful in that it draws attention to the fact that even Freddoso's account of the truth–makers of future–tense propositions requires the existence of tensed facts, a point which is insisted upon independently by advocates of a dynamic theory of time, [30] which, it will be recalled, is presupposed by this version of truth–making for tensed sentences. That raises the question whether we might not as well just let the relevant tensed facts be the truth–makers of tensed propositions. The regress spotted by O'Connor concerns the truth–conditions of the sentence "There are now grounds for the truth of *Fp*," and this regress is benign, since it is simply a series of entailments of one future–tense proposition by another.

Indeed, O'Connor had better hope that such a regress is benign, since on his *own* view Freddoso's formula does successfully give the truth–conditions of any future–tense proposition *Fp*, *viz*.:

Fp η p will have grounds at some future time *t*.

Since the right–hand side of the equivalence has itself the form *Fp*, one embarks on an infinite regress. In agreeing that Freddoso's formula does successfully give the truth conditions of a future–tense proposition despite the infinite regress involved, O'Connor tacitly agrees that such a regress is benign. O'Connor protests that he does not face the same problem as Freddoso because "this biconditional is not intended to prescribe a procedure by which it may be determined whether a future contingent is *grounded*–it is simply indicating that it . . . is in fact true." [31] This alleged difference, however, is rooted in O'Connor's confusion noted above concerning the truth–maker of *Fp* and the truth–conditions of "*Fp* has a truth–maker"; there is on his own view still a (benign) infinite regress because the right–hand side of the above equivalence has itself the form *Fp*. O'Connor also defends himself by saying that his adaptation of Freddoso's formula is not a

prescription of "how one may determine whether such propositions are true." [32] But, of course, neither is Freddoso intending to provide a prescription for determining in O'Connor's epistemic sense whether *Fp* does have a truth–maker or not.

Similarly, when we turn from future–tense propositions to counterfactual propositions and consider Freddoso's proposed truth–makers for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, we see that O'Connor's denial that "there is something 'there "objectively" to be known'" [33] is rooted in the same crude understanding of truth–makers already exposed. As for the supposedly vicious infinite regress, it is again a benign regress of entailments generated by the truth–conditions of the statement "*F t (p) on H* has a truth–maker."

That the regress concerns truth–conditions, not truth–makers, is especially evident in Flint's defense of Freddoso's position. Flint proposes the following formula to give the truth–maker of a counterfactual of creaturely freedom $c \rightarrow z$:

F. "It *would be* the case (if c were true) that z" is now grounded iff "z is grounded" *would be* the case (if c were true). [34]

It is evident that what is provided here are truth conditions for the claim that "$c \rightarrow z$ is now grounded," not a truth–maker for $c \rightarrow z$. In fact, ironically, Flint never really does tell us what the truth–maker of $c \rightarrow z$ is! He misconstrues his own account when he says, for example, that a person's activity in a nearby possible world is what grounds a counterfactual of creaturely freedom which is true in the actual world. [35] Such an interpretation conjures up ghostly images of merely possible agents doing things in their worlds which produce causal effects in ours, surely a bizarre and untenable picture! Rather on the Freddoso–Flint view, the truth–maker of $c \rightarrow z$ is something like the fact that *the statement "z has a truth–maker" would be true* (*if c were true*). This fact or state of affairs exists or obtains as robustly in the actual world as any other actual fact or state of affairs and is an unobjectionable truth–maker. Thus it is a misconceived worry to wonder how merely possible activities ground actual truths, just as it is a misconceived worry to puzzle over how non–existent past or future activities could ground present truths. They do not.

For my part, I should say that if true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom have truth–makers, then the most obvious and plausible candidates are the facts or states of affairs disclosed by the disquotation principle. Thus, what makes it true that "If I were rich, I would buy a Mercedes," is the fact that if I were rich I would buy a Mercedes. Just as there are tensed facts about the past or future which now exist, even though the objects and events they are about do not, so there are counterfacts which actually exist, even though the objects and events they are about do not. If counterfactuals of creaturely freedom require truth–makers, then it is in virtue of these facts or

states of affairs that the corresponding propositions are true. And since these counterfacts are not the result of God's decree, the relevant states of affairs must obtain even logically prior to God's decree to create any concrete objects.

In his development of the grounding objection, Hasker does seem to countenance states of affairs as truth–makers. But, he insists, "In order for a (contingent) conditional state of affairs to obtain, its obtaining must be grounded in some categorical state of affairs. More colloquially, truths about 'what *would be the case . . . if'* must be grounded in truths about what *is in fact* the case." [36] For example, the truth of counterfactuals like "If the glass were struck, it would shatter" is grounded "in the natures, causal powers, inherent tendencies, and the like, of the natural entities described in them." [37]

Hasker's claim is, however, very muddled. An obtaining state of affairs just is the ground or truth–maker of some truth and so is not itself "grounded" in the relevant sense. Moreover, truths do not have other truths as their grounds or truth–makers, but rather states of affairs. With respect to counterfactuals concerning instances of natural kinds like the glass, the truth of the counterfactual is arguably grounded in a dispositional property of the object, such as in this case the glass's fragility. Such a dispositional property may be plausibly taken to be the truth–maker of the relevant counterfactual and even to ensure its necessary truth. [38] Moreover, it is correct to say that dispositional properties have a causal basis in the categorical properties of a natural object, such as the molecular structure of the glass. But it is a *non sequitur* to conclude that the causal basis of a disposition is the truth–maker of the relevant counterfactual. For if there were different laws of nature, that same molecular structure might not serve to make glass fragile. It is the glass's fragility which is the truth–maker of the counterfactual at issue, and the causal basis of the disposition is at most responsible, not for the glass's fragility, but for the manifestation of that fragility, that is to say, for the actual shattering of the glass. Thus, in Armstrong's analysis the truth–maker for the categorical statement "The glass is fragile" is the glass's having a certain molecular structure plus the laws of nature. [39] But the rub is that laws of nature, as Plantinga observes, [40] are equivalent to various counterfactual propositions, like "If *x* were cooled to 00, it would expand," so that one might just as well have said that the truth–maker of "The glass is fragile" is the glass's having a certain molecular structure plus certain counterfacts of nature. Thus, even a categorical statement concerning dispositional properties of a natural object arguably has among its truthmakers certain counterfacts, not to speak of a counterfactual statement grounded in the dispositional properties of an object. Thus, Hasker's claim that counterfactuals must be purely categorically grounded is unwarranted.

How much more dubious is Hasker's claim when it comes to personal agents endowed with freedom of the will! For free choice is not a matter of natural dispositions involving causal bases.

Indeed, as I have elsewhere charged, [41] the grounding objection seems implicitly to reject libertarian freedom, for on a libertarian view there is no further "grounding" to be sought for why there obtains a certain counterfactual state of affairs about how some agent would freely act under certain circumstances. To seek an answer to the question "Why is *F* a fact?" or "What makes *F* a fact?" is implicitly to deny libertarian freedom. It is simply a fact that that is how that agent would freely choose to act under those circumstances..

Conclusion

In conclusion, I think that it is evident that anti–Molinists have not even begun to do the necessary homework in order for their grounding objection to fly. They have yet to articulate their ontology of truth, including the nature of truth–bearers and truth–makers. Nor have they yet presented a systematic account of which truth–bearers require truth–makers. Neither have they applied their theory to counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, much less shown its superiority to competing theories. Of course, it is open to grounding objectors to abjure a theory of truth–makers altogether and to assert that in construing their talk about grounds of truth for counterfactuals of creaturely freedom in terms of truth–makers I have misunderstood or misrepresented them. Perhaps grounds of truth are different from truth–makers. But if this is the case, then anti–Molinists owe us all the more a careful account of what they are talking about. Until they provide that, their grounding objection cannot even hope to get off the ground.

In short, I agree with Plantinga that I am far more confident that there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom than I am of the theory which requires that they have truth–makers. [42] And if they do require truth–makers, no reason has been given why their truth–makers cannot be the facts or states of affairs which are disclosed by the disquotation principle. [43]

Footnotes

[1]

Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence,* Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 123. The doctrine of divine middle knowledge (*media scientia*), first articulated by the Counter–Reformation theologian Luis de Molina in 1588, holds that God's decree concerning which world to create is based upon and, hence, explanatorily posterior to His knowledge of what every free creature He could possibly create would do in any appropriately specified set of circumstances in which God might place him. Thus logically prior to His creative decree, God knows the truth of propositions describing how some creature would freely act in a

specific set of circumstances, *e.g.*, *If Goldwater were to win the U.S. presidential election in 1964, he would order the invasion of North Viet Nam.* The doctrine presupposes that there are such true counterfactuals and that their truth is logically independent of the divine decree. For an outstanding introduction to and translation of a crucial portion of Molina's *Concordia*, see Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[2]

Flint, *Divine Providence*, p. 123.

[3]

Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to Robert Adams," in *Alvin Plantinga,* ed. James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, Profiles 5 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), p. 378.

[4]

Van Inwagen's objection that it might be the case that the agent would on one occasion do *A* and on a second go–around not do *A* actually supports the Molinist case, for these are two *different* turns and thus different sets of circumstances, and by Van Inwagen's own lights on each turn the agent would do something (Peter Van Inwagen, "Against Middle Knowledge," lecture dated April 12, 1996).

[5]

See the seminal article by Kevin Mulligan, Peter Simons, and Barry Smith, "Truth–Makers," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44 (1984): 287–321. An informative survey of the historical background of truth–maker theory may be found in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Scwabe, 1971), s.v. "Tatsache II," by Peter Simons. See further John F. Fox, "Truthmaker," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1987): 188–207; Herbert Hochberg, "Truth Makers, Truth Predicates, and Truth Types," in *Language, Truth, and Ontology,* ed. Kevin Mulligan, Philosophical Studies Series 51 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), pp. 87–117.

[6]

Peter Simons, "How the World Can Make Propositions True: A Celebration of Logical Atomism," in *Sktonnosci Metafizyczna* [*Metaphysical Inclinations*] (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, 1998), p. 119.

[7]

Peter Simons, "Existential Propositions," in *Criss–Crossing a Philosophical Landscape*, ed. Joachim Schulte and Göran Sundholm, Grazer Philosophische Studien 42 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), p. 257.

[8]

Ibid. The theist must regard this characterization as untenable, however, since (unless one denies with William Alston that God has beliefs) God's beliefs then count as truth–makers for the propositions He believes. For God's beliefs are usually taken to be entities in a sense countenanced by truth–maker theory, often being characterized as "hard" or "soft" facts about the past. But taking God's beliefs as truth–makers seems to stand things on their head, since intuitively something is not true because God believes it, but God believes it because it is true. Moreover, if God's beliefs are explanatorily prior to the truth of propositions about human actions, then creaturely freedom would seem to be eliminated, just as divine freedom would be eliminated if counterfactuals of divine freedom were true explanatorily prior to God's decree. Bigelow states the truth–maker principle more acceptably: "What Truthmaker says is: 'For each truth *A* there must be something *a* such that, *necessarily, if a exists then A is true*' " (John Bigelow, *The Reality of Numbers* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], p. 127). Unfortunately this principle is false because it entails truth–maker maximalism (see below); but at least it captures the idea that truth–making is essentially a logical relation. Perhaps the truth–maker theorist should say that for any truth–bearer *A* which has a truth–maker *a*, *A* is true in virtue of *a* (or *a* makes *A* true) =$_\text{def.}$ *a*'s existence entails that *A* has the value *true*.

[9]

Mulligan, Simons, and Smith, "Truth–Makers," p. 315.

[10]

Robert Adams, "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in *Alvin Plantinga,* p. 232. Cf. William Hasker's demand, "Who or what is it (if anything) that *brings it about* that these propositions are true?" (William Hasker, "A Refutation of Middle knowledge," *Noûs* 20 (1986): 547.

[11]

Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction" to *On Divine Foreknowledge* by Luis de Molina, trans. with Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 70.

[12]

Flint, *Divine Providence,* pp. 123, 125. I should add that Freddoso and Flint are simply accurately reporting the objection as formulated by the detractors of middle knowledge.

[13]

"Making to be the case is of course not *causal*" (D. M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs,* Cambridge Studies in Philosophy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], p. 115); "The notion 'makes it true that' has nothing to do with causality" (Peter Simons, "Logical Atomism and Its Ontological Refinement: A Defense," in *Language, Truth, and Ontology*, p. 159); "A truthmaker should 'make' something true, not in a causal sense, but rather, in what is presumably a logical sense. . . . the 'making' in 'making true' is essentially logical entailment" (Bigelow, *Reality of Numbers*, p. 125).

[14]

Mulligan, Simons, and Smith, "Truth–Makers," p. 315.

[15]

Armstrong, *World of States of Affairs,* pp. 27, 135.

[16]

According to a dynamic or tensed theory of time (often, in nomenclature borrowed from McTaggart, called an A–Theory of time), the distinction between past, present, and future is an objective feature of reality, whereas on a static or tenseless theory of time (often called the B–Theory of time), moments of time are not objectively past, present, or future but are ordered by the unchanging relations *earlier than*, *simultaneous with*, and *later than*. Moreover, on a dynamic theory, temporal becoming is real, and things come into being and go out of existence; whereas on the static theory temporal becoming is but a subjective feature of consciousness, and all things are equally real regardless of their temporal location.

[17]

Barry Smith, "Truthmaker Realism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1999): 274–291.

[18]

See, for example, D. H. Mellor, *Real Time II* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 34.

[19]

Compare the tensed truth–conditions given by Graham Priest, "Tense and Truth Conditions," *Analysis* 46 (1986): 162–166; see further D.H. Mellor, "Tense's Tenseless Truth Conditions," *Analysis* 46 (1986): 167–172; Graham Priest, "Tense, *Tense*, and TENSE," *Analysis* 47 (1987): 184–187.

[20]

And, of course, the same holds for counterfactuals about how creatures would freely act under various circumstances which are not, technically speaking, counterfactuals of creaturely freedom because the circumstances mentioned in their antecedents are not fully specified. So as to avoid pedantry, I shall henceforth not distinguish such counterfactual truths from counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.

[21]

Simons, "Logical Atomism," p. 158. Bigelow is embarrassed by the "linguistic magic" that guides truth–maker theory–"inferring the *existence* of certain things from the *truth* of certain claims: a way of calling things into existence by linguistic magic–*defining* things into existence" (Bigelow, *Reality of Numbers,* p. 7).

[22]

Greg Restall, "Truthmakers, Entailment, and Necessity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996): 334.

[23]

Restall proposes to solve the problem by an account of truth–makers in which he leaves his truth–makers undefined. The abstractness of the account only reinforces how ham–fisted is the handling of truth–makers by grounding objectors.

[24]

This is Barry Smith's term.

[25]

Freddoso, "Introduction," p. 72. A future–tense proposition may be understood as a proposition whose linguistic expression in English must involve the future–tense.

[26]

Timothy O'Connor, "The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 66 (1992): 155–156. Thus, O'Connor provides a semantics more consistent with a dynamic theory of time than does David Paul Hunt, "Middle Knowledge: The 'Foreknowledge Defense'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 28 (1990): 7, who says that future–tense statements "*are* true in virtue of corresponding to an actual state of affairs, albeit one that lies in the future."

[27]

Ibid., pp. 158–9. O'Connor retreats from denying the *truth* of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom to denying their *knowability.* His denial is based on the assumption that "God's infallible knowledge of a genuinely contingent proposition *p* involves or just consists of an immediate acquaintance with the grounds for *p*" (Ibid., p. 158). This is an astonishing claim. It entails that God is ignorant of all true contingent propositions which lack truth–makers. Why think that the way in which God knows true propositions is by knowing what are their truth–makers? O'Connor answers, "One cannot, after all, discern the truth of a contingent proposition by having a specially penetrating insight into the nature of the proposition itself" (Ibid., p. 159). If O'Connor is correct in this assertion, then God will be ignorant not only of all contingent truths which lack truth–makers, but He will also be ignorant of all non–analytic necessary truths as well, since those also lack truth–makers, according to standard truth–maker theory. O'Connor's position is thus incompatible with classical theism. In any case, his justification for restricting God's knowledge to propositions which have truth–makers is wholly implausible. For given the ontology of truth presupposed by the theory of truth–makers, there really are entities, like propositions, which serve as truth–bearers. These are real property–bearing entities, and one of the properties they bear is truth (or falsity). This is a genuine property inhering in some, but not all, of these entities. Therefore, God most certainly can by an immediate inspection of the proposition itself discern whether it bears the property of truth or not.

Indeed, thinkers like O'Connor and Hasker, who admit the bivalence of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom or future contingent propositions (see Flint, *Divine Providence,* p. 130) but deny God's knowledge of the same, find themselves in an ultimately incoherent position. For what must they say concerning a present–tense proposition *q* to the effect that a particular future contingent proposition *Fp* or counterfactual of creaturely freedom *F t(p) on H*, is true? If *q* is now true, then, as a present–tense proposition, God must know it. Indeed, *q* seems to have an evident truth–maker, namely, the inherence of the property of truth in *Fp* or *F t(p) on H*. The state of affairs of *Fp's being true* is not only a contingent state of affairs which presently obtains in the world, but *Fp's being true* is literally an event, since *Fp* may change in its truth value once *p* becomes true, in which case *q* undergoes an intrinsic change from being true to being false. Thus, if *q,* God must know

that *q* and, hence, know that *Fp* and *F t(p) on H* are true. But if He knows that these propositions are true, then He knows the facts which they state. Thus, anyone who agrees that the Principle of Bivalence governs future contingent propositions or counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and who holds that God knows all presently true propositions or is immediately acquainted with all existing truth–makers cannot on pain of incoherence deny that God knows the truth of future contingent propositions and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. This conclusion presents a real crisis for thinkers like Hasker whose only escape from theological fatalism is to deny God's foreknowledge of true future contingent propositions.

[28]

O'Connor, "Impossibility," p. 155.

[29]

Ibid., pp. 155–156.

[30]

See discussion in my *The Tensed Theory of Time: a Critical Examination,* Synthèse Library (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, forthcoming). Michael Tooley would be a rare exception.

[31]

O'Connor, "Impossibility," pp. 164–165.

[32]

Ibid., p. 165.

[33]

Ibid., p. 160.

[34]

Flint, *Divine Providence,* p. 133.

[35]

Ibid. Cf. his remark that "counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do have grounds, though (as with propositions about the past or future or about what is metaphysically possible) we might not find

such grounds at the prersent time or in the actual world" *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Omniscience," by Thomas P. Flint.

[36]

William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge,* Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 30.

[37]

Ibid.

[38]

See Frank Jackson, Robert Pargetter, and Elizabeth W. Prior, "Three Theses about Dispositions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1982): 251–258; Robert Pargetter and Elizabeth W. Prior, "The Dispositional and the Categorical," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (1982): 366–370.

[39]

Armstrong, *States of Affairs,* pp. 70–73, 129.

[40]

Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity,* Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 178.

[41]

William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 261–262.

[42]

Cf. The remark of Mulligan, Simons, and Smith, "Truth–Makers," p. 299: it is "perfectly rational for us to know *that* a sentence is true and yet not know completely *what* makes it true."

[43]

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