

A THEORY OF TRUTHMAKING

The theory of truthmaking has long aroused skepticism from philosophers who believe it to be tangled up in contentious ontological commitments and unnecessary theoretical baggage. In this book, Jamin Asay shows why that suspicion is unfounded. Challenging the current orthodoxy that truthmaking's fundamental purpose is to be a tool for explaining why truths are true, Asay revives the conception of truthmaking as fundamentally an exercise in ontology: a means for coordinating one's beliefs about what is true and one's ontological commitments. He goes on to show how truthmaking connects to analyticity, truth, and realism, and how it contributes to debates over nominalism, presentism, mathematical objects, and fictional characters. His book is the most comprehensive exploration to date into what truthmaking is and how it contributes to metaphysical debates across philosophy, and will interest a wide range of readers in metaphysics and beyond.

JAMIN ASAY is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hong Kong. He is the author of *The Primitivist Theory of Truth* (Cambridge, 2013) and numerous articles on truth, truthmaking, and realism.

A THEORY OF
TRUTHMAKING

Metaphysics, Ontology, and Reality

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For Charlie and Sid

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Preface

From the time I first began studying the theory of truthmaking, over ten years ago now, I have been struck by just how many philosophers are suspicious of it. The distrust, I've gathered, boils down to its association with realist metaphysics – overzealously realist metaphysics, in the eyes of the critics. My graduate programs were more than hospitable to the antirealist and nominalist ideas found in Hume, Carnap, Quine, and Dummett, and expressivism was widely and positively discussed. Even as I spent a semester studying in Australia – supposedly as safe a place for realist metaphysics as one can find – I found myself in Sydney, where Huw Price had taken up the Challis Professorship of Philosophy, previously held for decades by David Armstrong. In one way or another, all my work on truthmaking addresses this antecedent skepticism. What is the best way to utilize the notion of truthmaking that can prove fruitful in ontological investigation, and yet be available to philosophers with a diverse set of background metaphysical commitments?

This book presents my attempt to find the right balance between realist and antirealist metaphysical perspectives, and how truthmaker theory is a useful tool for discovering it. In the preface to my earlier book on the nature of truth, I noted the importance of separating the conceptual investigation into the nature of our concept of truth from the metaphysical investigation of what makes truths true. The earlier volume speaks to the first project; the present volume speaks to the latter.

As this monograph has been over ten years in the making, I am indebted to a great number of individuals and institutions that have aided me along the way. The Research Grants Council of Hong Kong awarded me an Early Career Scheme grant (HKU 23400014) that provided time for me to write and funds for traveling to present my research in a number of venues around the world. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Hong Kong funded a workshop that I organized around the manuscript. My thanks go to Sam Baron, Ray Briggs, Max Deutsch, Tom Donaldson, Joe Lau, and

Jenn Wang for attending the workshop and providing me a great amount of feedback on the text.

Ideas found in the text have been presented in various forms at the Australasian Association of Philosophy Conference, North Carolina Philosophical Society Annual Meeting, Midsouth Philosophy Conference, Ohio Philosophical Association Annual Meeting, Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, Taiwan Philosophical Logic Colloquium, Korean Society for Analytic Philosophy, Pluralisms Global Research Network Workshop, and the Explanaza workshop hosted by the University of Western Australia, as well as to the philosophy departments at the University of Sydney, Oklahoma State University, University of Oxford, University of Minnesota Duluth, National University of Singapore, University of Aberdeen, University of Hong Kong, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Yale-NUS College. My thanks go to all these many audiences for their lively discussions and constructive feedback.

Portions of Chapter 6 are largely taken from “Truthmakers against Correspondence,” to be published in *Grazer Philosophische Studien*. I thank Brill for permission to publish here. Chapter 7 is largely taken from my paper “Truth(making) by Convention,” to be published in *American Philosophical Quarterly*. I thank the University of Illinois Press for permission to publish here.

Countless friends and colleagues have discussed and debated these ideas with me over the years. For that support, I’d like to thank Andrew Bailey, Derek Baker, Simon Blackburn, Ben Blumson, Seth Bordner, Jason Bowers, David Braddon-Mitchell, Ray Briggs, Matthew Carlson, Mark Colyvan, Patrick Connolly, Adam Cureton, Felipe De Brigard, Max Deutsch, Douglas Edwards, Katie Elliott, Pete Evans, Dana Falkenberg, Alison Fernandes, Elizabeth Foreman, Chris Fraser, Dimitria Gatzia, Emily Given, Patrick Greenough, Matthew Hammerton, Thomas Hofweber, Mark Jago, Carrie Jenkins, Drew Johnson, Michael Johnson, Emily Kelahan, Matt Kotzen, Dave Landy, Marc Lange, Joe Lau, Ian Lawson, Cathay Liu, Paisley Livingston, Bill Lycan, Raamy Majeed, Nick Malpas, Kristie Miller, Clair Morrissey, Jenny Nado, Shyam Nair, Alan Nelson, Ram Neta, Laurie Paul, Nikolaj Pedersen, Michael Pendlebury, Jamaal Pitt, Huw Price, Mike Resnik, Dave Ripley, John Roberts, Darrell Rowbottom, Andrea Sauchelli, Frank Saunders, Geoff Sayre-McCord, Jonathan Schaffer, Nate Sharadin, Mat Simpson, Tuomas Tahko, Jonathan Tallant, Elanor Taylor, Kelly Trogdon, Piers Norris Turner, Jo Wolff, Jeremy Wyatt, and Syraya Chin-mu Yang, with apologies to anyone I have left out.

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Special thanks go to Jack Yip, who read some chapters of the manuscript and devoted many hours to discussing the topics herein with me. David Armstrong, before he passed away, was incredibly generous with his time while I was a visiting scholar at the University of Sydney. I will always be thankful for my chance to discuss my ideas on truthmaking with him as we strolled the streets of Glebe and had afternoon tea at his home. For nearly a decade, Sam Baron has been a wonderful interlocutor and coauthor, and his influence is found throughout this work. I thank him for all his many contributions to my thinking over the years.

Keith Simmons and Dorit Bar-On deserve special recognition for their ongoing friendship and support, and for inviting me to the University of Connecticut to discuss my work during their graduate seminar. They are exemplary models of how to do logically rigorous and empirically informed philosophy.

My thanks again go to Hilary Gaskin and the team at Cambridge for their support of the project and swift, expert editorial guidance. Thanks also go to the external reviewers of the manuscript; their extensive comments have greatly improved the book.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my partner Emily Matchar and our sons Charlie and Sid. They have undoubtedly made it true that the experience of writing this book has been a rewarding and fulfilling one. I couldn't have asked for a better source of love and support.

