

Truthmaker and the Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge

ALEXANDER ZAMBRANO

Luis de Molina's doctrine of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) is a prominent view in contemporary philosophical theology that aims to resolve the *prima facie* incompatibility between divine foreknowledge and human freedom¹. Molina's position, now called *Molinism*, claims that God has three types of knowledge, each of which he utilizes when creating a world of free creatures. The crux of the Molinist account is that God has middle knowledge: that is, logically prior to the actual world, God knows true *counterfactuals of freedom*, propositions describing what every logically possible person would freely do in every logically possible situation God could place her in. God's knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom is called *middle knowledge* because it falls between God's natural knowledge of all necessary truths and his free knowledge of all contingent truths². The philosophical appeal of Molinism is that counterfactuals of freedom are contingent truths that were not up to God. The truth-value of a counterfactual of freedom, then, depends on what the creature designated in the proposition would *actually* and *freely* do had God created her and placed her in a particular set of circumstances. If God can know true counterfactuals of freedom logically prior to the actual world, says the Molinist, then God can have foreknowledge about what human creatures will do and at

¹For a contemporary explication and defense of middle knowledge and the Molinist perspective, see Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998).

²Free knowledge is distinguishable from God's natural knowledge by being true in virtue of God's will. A bit more precisely, God's free-knowledge is post-volitional and contains contingent

Alexander Zambrano is a senior at Loyola Marymount University majoring in philosophy. His interests include metaphysics, philosophy of religion, medieval philosophy, and epistemology. He is currently applying to PhD programs in philosophy.

the same time preserve their libertarian freedom.

Despite the initial theological and philosophical appeal of Molinism, it has been challenged on many fronts by eager anti-Molinists. The most prominent and popular line of objection against the tenability of there being true counterfactuals of freedom has come to be called the Grounding objection. This objection claims, roughly, that there is nothing that exists which could make or cause counterfactuals of freedom to have a truth-value. This worry about grounding the truth of counterfactuals of freedom has led philosophers to suspect that there being true counterfactuals of freedom violates some form of Truthmaker- a theory which says that propositions are made true by *actual* beings or things in the world³. However, despite the prominence of the Grounding objection and its implicit reliance on Truthmaker, it has not been articulated with sufficient sophistication by anti-Molinists.

In this paper, I articulate the Grounding objection by developing two theses that have become prominent in Truthmaker theory: *Necessitarianism and Essential Dependence*. I discuss and articulate an account of necessitarianism and essential dependence in order to state a coherent Grounding objection to middle knowledge. After articulating and further developing both accounts, I formulate a grounding objection based on my analysis of necessitarianism and essential dependence. Finally, I argue that there being true counterfactuals of freedom logically prior to the actual world violates the Truthmaker principles of necessitarianism and essential dependence as I have developed them. Since Molinism depends upon the tenability of there being counterfactuals of freedom, and if in the end we have good reason to accept Truthmaker, then the grounding objection remains as a substantive and decisive objection to the doctrine of middle knowledge.

I. Middle Knowledge

The crucial supposition of Molinism is that God has middle knowledge, that is, he knows true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, the truth of which is out of God's control. Counterfactuals of freedom (CFF)

truths about the world that God has created. For example, while it's necessarily true in the broadly logical sense that $\langle 3+5=8 \rangle$, it is only contingently true that $\langle \text{Barack Obama exists} \rangle$. While the former could not have failed to be true and hence, is necessary, it didn't have to be the case that $\langle \text{Barack Obama exists} \rangle$ is true. The proposition that $\langle \text{Barack Obama exists} \rangle$ is therefore part of God's post-volitional free-knowledge.

³For a first glance at the Grounding Objection's reliance on Truthmaker, see William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truthmakers, and The Grounding Objection," in *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 337-52. See also Trenton Merricks, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

are commonly taken to be subjunctive conditional propositions of the form, If P were in C , P would freely do S . First, we should note that CFF represents what an agent P would freely do if placed in a particular circumstance C . Thus, CFF is about an agent with libertarian free will, or at least one that is not causally determined. Second, because counterfactuals of freedom are true logically prior to creation (or prior to the actualization of a possible world) and therefore before the existence of any actual and free persons, we should understand CFF, following Alvin Plantinga and Thomas Flint, as claiming the following: if essence E were instantiated and placed in circumstance C , E would freely do S , where an essence E is the particular and individuating essence of an individual⁴. Third, some Molinists say that the principle of bivalence applies to counterfactuals of freedom thus making every counterfactual of freedom either true or false. Indeed, commonly thwarted evidence for this view on the part of Molinists⁵, is the subjunctive conditional law of excluded middle (SCLEM) which says that for any proposition $p \Box \rightarrow q$, then $(p \Box \rightarrow q) \vee (p \Box \rightarrow \sim q)$ is true. Given SCLEM, says the Molinist, for any counterfactual of freedom, either the agent would do the action q or would not do the action $\sim q$, had she been placed in that particular circumstance. Finally and most importantly, counterfactuals of freedom are thought to be contingent truths, ones that are not necessarily true and that could have failed to be true.

II. The Grounding Objection

The contingency of counterfactuals of freedom is, I think, the vice and virtue of the Molinist account. The virtue is that a counterfactual is true if and only if its consequent describes what the person in question would actually and freely do if placed in those circumstances. This leaves the truth of counterfactuals of freedom up to what that agent would do if she were actually placed in those circumstances. But, then, the vice: if counterfactuals of freedom are true, then neither God, nor the actual persons described in the proposition, makes the proposition true. The Grounding objector now enters the discussion and asks: "What makes or causes counterfactuals to be true?" Thus, Robert Adams, a prominent anti-Molinist says

⁴Using essences instead of persons allows us to ward off the difficulty of talking about merely possible persons and in addition, because essences exist necessarily (though instantiated in only some but not every world), we can be more precise in our characterization of counterfactuals of freedom. But when referring to counterfactuals of freedom throughout the rest of this paper, I will simply use the term 'person' instead of essence.

It has been doubted whether counterfactuals of freedom can be true, and hence whether middle knowledge is possible. Counterfactuals of freedom, as I have pointed out, are supposed to be contingent truths that are not caused to be true by God. Who or what does cause them to be true? (Adams 232)

Adams demands that counterfactuals of freedom need grounding, that is, that there needs to be something or some entity that is sufficient for their truth. William Hasker gives us another clue about what the grounding objection claims: 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” (Hasker 30). From these comments from Adams and Hasker, two prominent grounding objectors, we might say that the grounding objection maintains, roughly, that counterfactuals of freedom are ungrounded because there is nothing ‘in the world’ or ‘actual’ that grounds their truth. I think we should understand the grounding objection (GO) to mean, perhaps implicitly, that there are no ‘truthmakers’ that cause or are sufficient for the truth of counterfactuals of freedom. If there are no true counterfactuals of freedom, says the grounding objector, God cannot know them and therefore, cannot have middle knowledge.

Let’s say, then, that the grounding objection to middle knowledge can be stated in the following way, where $c \rightarrow z$ is a counterfactual of freedom: ‘ $c \rightarrow z$ ’ is true if and only if $\exists x [x \rightarrow (c \rightarrow z)]$. GO captures the essence of the grounding objection as explicated by Adams and Hasker. Still, though, GO is rather vague. What, besides the pure intuition that true propositions are grounded in *what exists*, is the grounding objection actually claiming? Is there more to the grounding objection than merely GO? Unfortunately, Hasker, Adams, and others⁵ provide no more than a mere brushstroke in their formulation of the grounding objection, and have yet to state their objection with sufficient sophistication nor any coherent conclusions about what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for a proposition to be properly grounded and hence, true.

Now let me lay my cards on the table. I am a Molinist: I believe that logically prior to creation there were true counterfactuals of freedom; admittedly, though, I do not know what sufficiently explains their truth.

⁵See, for instance, William Lane Craig, “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the Grounding Objection” in *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 337-52.

⁶See Steven Cowan “The grounding objection to middle knowledge revisited” in *Religious Studies* 39 (2003): 93-102, and Scott Davison “Craig on the Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge” in *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 365-369.

What I do know, however, is that grounding objectors have not sufficiently argued for their position. In what follows, I develop my interlocutor’s position in order to understand the grounding objection and middle knowledge in general. Because the grounding objection implicitly relies on the theory known as Truthmaker, I will articulate and develop a few prominent Truthmaker principles in order to understand what the Grounding objection is really claiming.

III. Truthmaker

The truthmaking intuition says that *truth depends on being*; that is, that truth depends on *what is*, or is *actually* the case. More exactly, it says that the truth-value of a proposition or truth bearer depends on actually existing things. Hence, <Fido is brown> is true, according to one view⁷, because there exists a state of affairs of *Fido being brown* which is sufficient for its truth. As a general statement, then, we should follow Barry Smith, Kevin Mulligans, and Peter Simons and say that a Truthmaker is an entity in virtue of which a statement proposition⁸, is true. Intimately related to Truthmaker, though not equivalent to it, is Truthmaker Maximalism, which according to David Armstrong, is the doctrine that every true proposition has a truthmaker. The grounding objection need not be committed to Maximalism, but it is implicitly committed to the basic truthmaker position, and for good reason: The fundamental truthmaking principle is very intuitive. After all, as Karen Bennett points out, “What are the alternatives? That truth floats free of being?”⁹

A truth (a proposition), is true in virtue of a truthmaker; a truthmaker is not true (or actual) in virtue of a truth. Truthmaking therefore involves an asymmetrical and irreflexive dependence relation. But why think so? It is irreflexive because no proposition can make itself true; it is made true in virtue of or by something ‘outside itself’¹⁰. If truthmaking were a symmetrical relation then we could say, possibly, <a dragon exists> makes it the case that an actual dragon does indeed exist. But,

⁷See D.M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), pg 5.

⁸Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith, Peter Simons, “Truth Makers” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44 (1984), pg 287.

⁹Karen Bennett, “Truthmaking and Case-Making”, forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, pg. 1.

¹⁰One might be tempted to provide a counter-example to the irreflexivity of the truthmaking dependence relation by saying that <there exists at least one proposition> is made true by the same proposition since, (as I assume), propositions exist necessarily. I’ll later show, however, that truthmakers about the actual world must be truthmakers that obtain or are actual, instead of just being entities that exist and could exist as abstracta.

the existence of a dragon doesn't depend on the truth of the proposition about it. Propositions, being abstract entities, are causally impotent, thus making the suggestion that a true proposition P makes it the case that a corresponding object O exists, absurd. Besides, the above example is not genuine truthmaking. Genuine truthmaking concerns what makes a proposition true, not 'what makes it the case' that a certain being or state of affairs exists¹¹.

IV. Necessitarianism

One ingredient to the truthmaking relation that is now quite standard among truthmaker theorists is necessitarianism¹². Necessitarianism says that for all X and for all P , if X is the truthmaker for P , then it is impossible that X exists and P fail to be true. On this view, a truthmaker F necessitates the truth of a given proposition P . But what sort of relation is at work here? If counterfactuals of freedom need ground for their truth, then understanding the relation involved in theories of necessitarianism is priority. The necessitation relation as defined above, is often interpreted in light of strict entailment (SE) between propositions¹³, where strict entailment is interpreted as $(p)(q) ((p \implies q) \rightarrow \neg \diamond(p \ \& \ \neg q))$. *Prima facie*, SE seems innocent enough and appears to capture the propositional necessity at work in necessitation. But it will not do. According to Greg Restall, necessitation put in terms of strict entailment has the implausible consequence that every truth is a truthmaker for every necessary truth. David Lewis says the same thing:

In a slogan: every truth has a truthmaker. Spelled out at greater length: for any true proposition P , there exists something T such that T 's existence strictly implies (necessitates) P ... if P is a necessary proposition, then for any T whatever, T 's existence strictly implies P . So the Truthmaker Principle, as I have stated it, applies only trivially to necessary truths. (604)

Thus, Lewis and Restall both worry that for any true p , $p \implies (q \vee \sim q)$ where $q \vee \sim q$ is a necessary truth. Thus, any truth strictly entails any neces-

¹¹Karen Bennett has made this distinction, between 'case making' and truthmaking. Case-making concerns what makes it the case that a certain object or state of affairs exists are existed, while Truthmaking has to do with what makes a proposition itself true. See, "Truthmaking and Case-Making" forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*

¹²Defenders of Necessitarianism include David Armstrong (2004: 6-7), Kit Fine (1982: 69), John F. Fox (1987: 189), George Molnar (2000: 84), and Barry Smith (1999: 276).

¹³See Greg Restall, "Truth-Makers, Entailment and Necessity" in *Truth and Truthmaking*, ed. by E.J. Lowe and Adolf Rami, McGill Queen's UP, 2009.

sary truth. But then truthmaking becomes trivial, for then any truth strictly entails any necessary truth you like. This result, it seems to me, cannot be right; truthmaking is more substantive than that. Consider two truths, $\langle A \text{ beetle exists} \rangle$ and $\langle \text{Obama is the current U.S. president} \rangle$. We typically wouldn't say that $\langle A \text{ beetle exists} \rangle$ or an actual beetle, for that matter, is the type of thing that should necessitate the truth of the law of identity $[\Box (x=x)]$, or that president Obama necessitates the truth that $2+2=4$. Though such items strictly imply necessary truths, we should not say they are genuine truthmakers for those truths. Indeed, when finding proposed truthmakers for $\langle A \text{ beetle exists} \rangle$ and $\langle \text{Obama is the current U.S. president} \rangle$ we tend to look for entities that the propositions are appropriately about, or entities that are relevantly the same as the objects described in the proposition. Thus we would turn to an actually existing beetle in the case of $\langle A \text{ beetle exists} \rangle$. This beetle not only necessitates $\langle A \text{ beetle exists} \rangle$, but the proposition is also appropriately about the actual beetle in question. This is because it, (the beetle), correctly represents the ontological commitments of $\langle A \text{ beetle exists} \rangle$. But if necessitation is the only ingredient to truthmaking, we have to admit that there are trivial truthmakers. But trivial truthmakers are not truthmakers at all. This should lead us to the conclusion that the necessity of strict implication should not be what we mean by necessitation or the 'truthmaking relation'.

If strict entailment defines the necessitation relation, then any P strictly entails any necessary truth. Are there any alternatives? David Armstrong gives us, a better way to look at the truthmaking relation. He says that necessitarianism is a necessary part of the truthmaking relation, yet the relation is not between propositions, but rather, between a portion of mind-independent reality (a truthmaker), and a proposition (a truth). Thus, for him, the relation between truth and truthmaker is *cross-categorical*, and entailment is of non-propositional necessity¹⁴. This cross-categorical relation, therefore, should still be committed to some form of necessitarianism: that is, we should still say that truthmakers necessitate their truths. But if the cross-categorical relation between a mind independent entity O and a truth T is not of propositional necessity, what kind of necessity is it? Further, why should we even hang onto necessitarianism? One rough argument for necessitarianism can be found most prominently in David Armstrong.

But what is the argument for saying that a truthmaker must necessitate a truth it is a truthmaker for? Here is an argument by *reductio*. Suppose that a suggested truthmaker T for a certain truth p fails to necessitate that truth.

¹⁴See Armstrong (2004: 6-7).

There will then be at least the possibility that T should exist and yet the proposition p not be true. This strongly suggests that there ought to be some further condition that must be satisfied in order for p to be true. This condition must either be the existence of a further entity U ... $T+U$ would appear to be the true and necessitating truthmaker for p . (6-7)

Let us assume that propositions exist necessarily, and that propositions can be false in certain worlds, but not non-existent in those worlds. The principle intuition behind Armstrong's argument is that if a truthmaker F exists but does not necessitate the truth of a corresponding proposition P , then there must be some further entity, truthmaker U , which, when combined with F , would make it impossible that P be false. The intuition sounds right, but how good is the argument? Ross P. Cameron has suggested that in the course of his *reductio* for necessitarianism, Armstrong has specified U as a further condition precisely because he has pre-supposed the truth of necessitarianism¹⁵. But has Armstrong really begged the question? Maybe he merely means to give an intuition pump to boost our confidence in the intuitive nature of necessitarianism. Perhaps, though, we can avoid question-begging problems and portray a scenario where the denial of necessitarianism seems metaphysically absurd.

Keeping in mind that different types of truths require different types of truthmakers, consider every world in which cats exist. Suppose, further, that the existential \langle a cat exists \rangle is not true in any of those worlds. This means that cats exist in worlds $W_1 \dots W_n$, and the proposition \langle a cat exists \rangle exists in all of those worlds but is not true in any of them. But such a scenario (the denial of some form of necessitarianism), sounds absurd. If a cat exists in a world (indeed, many cats), then \langle a cat exists \rangle must be true in that world. Indeed in a world with many cats, \langle a cat exists \rangle has many truthmakers.

But if a substantial part of truthmaking is not necessitarianism, then, possibly, a proposition is false even if its corresponding truthmaker exists. But this is absurd. Therefore, necessitarianism is true. We should therefore say that the type of necessity involved in truthmaking is not propositional necessity, but perhaps some type of cross-categorical relation that involves necessitation. This means that any grounding objection to middle knowledge ought to say that some being or some entity must necessitate a counterfactual of freedom or else *what exists* does not guarantee what is true. Our first step in the grounding objection therefore ought to say GO_1 which is to say, ' $c \rightarrow z$ ' is true if and only if $\exists x \square (x \implies (c \rightarrow z))$ ¹⁶.

¹⁵See Cameron (2008: 6).

Or, in English, 'if P were in C , P would freely do Z ' is true if and only if, there exists some X such that, necessarily, if X exists then it is impossible that 'if P were in C , P would freely do Z ' be false. But GO_1 alone will not give the grounding objector all she needs. GO_1 , is missing a relation of what we could call, *aboutness*. While truthmakers should necessitate their truths, truths (propositions) must be appropriately about their truthmakers. But if every truth necessitates (strictly entails) every necessary truth, then my Mac computer necessitates the truth of ' $2+2=4$ ' and the law of identity. But this sounds counterintuitive.

Take another example to illustrate the insufficiency of GO_1 and hence the need for the aboutness relation. Some theists might be tempted to say the following: that 'God's knowledge of X ' is a genuine truthmaker for $\langle X$ exists \rangle . But take the actual world, and consider the truth \langle an apple exists \rangle . Omniscience tells us that, necessarily, for all P , if P is true, then God knows that P . These same theists might be tempted into saying that the state of affairs of *God knowing* \langle an apple exists \rangle is a genuine truthmaker for \langle an apple exists \rangle . This is because according to omniscience, God cannot know false propositions and since apples do in fact exist, God's knowing that \langle an apple exists \rangle makes the proposition true. On this view, then, God's knowing that P necessitates that P is true. This view may correctly rely on a theory of necessitarianism, but it fails to take into account an important part of truthmaking. Therefore, there is no problem with the position that, given omniscience (as defined above), God's knowing that an \langle an apple exists \rangle necessitates the truth of \langle an apple exists \rangle . But this is not genuine truthmaking since \langle an apple exists \rangle isn't appropriately *about* the state of affairs of 'God's knowledge of that proposition'. Given these considerations, what, then, does it mean to say that a proposition is appropriately about a truthmaker?

V. Aboutness and Essential Dependence

We have seen that defining necessitation in terms of strict implication leads to truthmaking trouble and that even if strict implication is replaced by a form of non-propositional necessity, there still remains the problem of having truths be appropriately about their truthmakers. I will discuss one approach that tries to remedy this problem.

EJ Lowe defends an account of truthmaking cast in terms of what he calls *essential dependence*¹⁷. First, we should understand the term es-

¹⁶I should note that symbol ' \implies ' between x and (clz) is an operator representing the non-propositional necessity at work in the cross categorical necessitation relation.

¹⁷See Lowe (2009).

sence, as it used by Lowe and I, to mean ‘that which makes a thing what it is’. The truthmaking account of essential dependence, for Lowe, means roughly that it is part of the essence of a proposition P that it is true if a certain entity or class of entities¹⁸ exist. One example that is helpful in illustrating what Lowe means by essential dependence is the mathematically necessary proposition <four plus five equals nine>. In regards to this arithmetical proposition, an account of essential dependence would say that it is part of the essence of <four plus five equals nine> that it is true if all the natural numbers exist, or at least all the natural numbers from one to nine. This is because the truth of the proposition essentially depends on the existence of these numbers since <four plus five equals nine> is about a certain arithmetical relation involving, at least, numbers one through nine. For Lowe, then, the intuition behind an essential dependence account of truthmaking is something like this: those entities that are essential to make a proposition true, are going to be entities that make the proposition what it is. Let us define, as Lowe does, essential dependence truthmaking (EDT) a little more precisely. EDT asserts proposition P is true only if there exists some X or X ’s such that it is part of the essence of P , that if P is true, then the X or X ’s exist¹⁹. But this means that every proposition will essentially be about certain entities. If propositions exist in every world (which is what I assume), then a consequence of EDT is that in every world in which the essential entities of a proposition don’t exist, is a world where the proposition is always false. But then, a further restriction on EDT would be something like, P is false unless there exists a specific entity related to P ’s essence. So, we should say, necessarily, a proposition is true only in virtue of a specific class of entities: those entities that compose the essence of the proposition. The advantage an essential dependence account has over other truthmaking accounts based on pure necessitation principles is that EDT narrows down what kind of entities can and cannot be truthmakers for certain propositions. EDT would therefore rule out my Mac computer as a truthmaker for < $2+2=4$ >. This is because it is not part of the essence of < $2+2=4$ > that it is true if my Mac computer exists.

An account of aboutness, cast in terms of essential dependence and necessitarianism, therefore ought to say the following: for all true P , P is about its truthmaker F , if and only if it is part of the essence of P , that if P is true, then (i) in every world in which P exists and F exists, P is true and (ii) P is false in every world where P exists and F fails to exist. (i) to (ii) are needed in order to bring out the notion of a proposition being relevantly

¹⁸Ibid., 217.

¹⁹Ibid., 215.

like the objects it represents. Since an entity F is part of the essence P , F has to be the same kind of entity or state of affairs as the one that P essentially represents. This is not so say that every truth has just one or one class of truthmakers. Indeed, in the actual world, the truth that <bears are brown> has many truthmakers, and the proposition is appropriately about its truthmakers: brown bears.

Thus when defining an adequate account of aboutness, we should ask, what are the truthmakers that the entities described in the proposition essentially depend on in order to be true? I think that when we ponder this question, all the entities we think of will be *relevantly similar* or appropriately *about* all the constituents of the proposition we are considering. The entities won’t be foreign or ‘far away’ from what the proposition actually denotes. Consider the truth <a table is brown>. The statement describes a certain table that has the property of being brown; it is therefore about a brown table. Next, we should say that the entities that this proposition essentially depends on would be first a substance (table), secondly, the property or universal, *brownness*, and thirdly, the state of affairs of *a table being brown*, or if you are inclined towards modes, the mode of *this table’s brownness*. The proposition <a table is brown> is appropriately about all these entities because all these entities are such that it is part of the essence of the proposition, that if it is true, then all these entities exist. Alternatively, the property or universal “purpleness” is not part of the essence of the proposition <a table is brown> and hence cannot be part of a class that are genuine truthmaker for <a table is brown>. Essential dependence, therefore, allows the truthmaker theorist to rule out counterfeit truthmakers by supplying an account of aboutness. Without this further constraint, anything could be a truthmaker for any necessary truth and there could be truthmakers that necessitate propositions that are not appropriately about them.

VI. The Truthmaker Objection to Middle Knowledge

But how is this relevant to the objects of middle knowledge, counterfactuals of freedom? Before diving into a truthmaker-inspired grounding objection, it would be helpful to define a few contemporary Molinist commitments. Again, let us assume that propositions exist necessarily and for the sake of explanation, let us also take states of affairs to be truthmakers. Though truthmaker theorists such as David Armstrong take states of affairs to be complex polyadic relations between actually existing objects and properties, attempting to ground counterfactuals of freedom in actual objects and properties is, problematic in this connection. To accommodate Molinist commitments then, let’s follow Alvin Plantinga and make

the distinction between states of affairs that exist and states of affairs that both exist and are *actual*²⁰. *Kobe Bryant being a professional tennis player* is a state of affairs that exists in the actual world, but is not actual or does not obtain, in the actual world. Alternatively, in the actual world, *Plantinga being a philosopher* is a state of affairs that both exists and is actual or obtains.

Molinism says that counterfactuals of freedom are true logically prior to creation-before any actual world or any actual states of affairs. Let m_1 be the moment logically prior to creation where God has knowledge of everything that is necessarily possible. And let m_2 be the moment where God has middle knowledge. According to the truthmaker accounts I have developed, at m_2 , the counterfactual of freedom (CF) ‘if Curley had been offered a bribe of \$30,000, he would have freely accepted it’ is true only if there exists some state of affairs S such that is part of the essence of (CF) that it is true if S exists. At m_1 and m_2 , the state of affairs *Curley taking the \$30,000 bribe* does exist, but only as abstracta; indeed at m_2 , this state of affairs exists but is non-actual. But then there is a tension between middle knowledge and the aboutness relation in conjunction with truthmaking in general. The truthmaking entities (states of affairs) in question must be actual in order to do any real truthmaking work. An account of aboutness based on essential dependence need not say that a proposition be only about actual entities. Aboutness can hold between a proposition and a non-actual entity that exists, but for the essential dependence relation to be of aid to Truthmaker, the entities a proposition is about must be actual.

To see why, think of what it would mean if we said, in that actual world, that \langle a unicorn exists \rangle is true in virtue of a non-actual entity, the state of affairs of *there being unicorns*. No doubt such a state of affairs exists and is about \langle a unicorn exists \rangle , but given the aboutness and necessitation relations, the reason we say in the actual world that \langle a unicorn exists \rangle is false, is that the entities on which the truth of the proposition essentially depends are not actual. In the actual world, the entities that are part of the essence of \langle a unicorn exists \rangle fail to be actual, and therefore, the proposition is false since there are no actual entities that are appropriately about the proposition, nor are there actual entities that necessitate the truth of the proposition in the actual world. The same story goes for counterfactuals of freedom. Thus we can write the truthmaker-based grounding objection (TGO) to middle knowledge more succinctly (taking W to be the actual world, and $c \rightarrow z$ to be a counterfactual of freedom).

²⁰See Plantinga’s ‘Actualism and Possible Worlds’ in *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, ed. Matthew Davidson, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

In any world W , $(c \rightarrow z)$ is true if and only if there exists some x , such that (i) X is actual, (ii) X necessitates that $(c \rightarrow z)$ and (iii) it is part of the essence of $c \rightarrow z$ that it is true if X exists. TGO captures all the plausible truthmaker principles I have developed, most importantly that of necessitation and aboutness.

A Molinist might insist, as William Lane Craig has, that if counterfactuals of freedom need truthmakers, then their truthmakers are ‘counterfacts’; facts or states of affairs that exist and are the entities in virtue of which counterfactuals of freedom are true²¹. So, according to Craig, ‘if P were in C , P would freely do S ’ is true in virtue of the ‘counterfact’ that if P were in C , P would freely do S . But the inclusion of ‘counterfacts’ about possible persons into ones ontology seems to be a desperate move on the part of the Molinist. Furthermore, TGO blocks the inclusion of counterfactuals as truthmakers. First, if counterfactuals are the truthmakers for counterfactuals of freedom, then the agent’s freedom becomes a mere triviality. Freedom in the libertarian sense is supposed to be about an actual agent performing an action on the basis of her own reasons and without some ‘counterfact’ necessitating what she would eventually do in an actual and particular set of circumstances. Worse, this counterfact, which is altogether mysterious, has to exist as an abstract and non-actual state of affairs prior to God’s actualization of a world. Additionally, the counterfact is said to exist prior to the existence of the actual person and her actual dispositions, character, and reasons to act. A counterfact about a non-actual person doesn’t seem to be the type of thing that is intimately *related* to or a product of what the actual person in question would freely and actually do. True, it is a state of affairs *about* a particular non-actual person, but there is no good reason for saying that a state of affairs (a counterfact) that exists prior to an agent’s actual existence, necessitates the counterfactual about what that agent would do.

Second, once God knows at m_2 that the counterfactual in question is true, then, when some world W is made actual and the agent is put in a particular circumstance, she must do what the consequent of the true counterfactual says she would do. But then it follows that this action was not up to the agent; rather, it was necessitated and hence, made true, by a counterfact, a non-actual state of affairs existing prior to the agent’s actual existence. But then, so much for libertarian freedom! The rub is that, prior to the existence of the actual agent, the true counterfact ends up explaining the truth-value of the counterfactual of freedom about the agent rather than the agent’s actual exercise of libertarian freedom. This is why

²¹See Craig (2001): www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5164&printer_friendly=1

I find Craig's strategy to be suspicious and an instance of mystery mongering. What I have said, however, is in no way a refutation of the idea that counterfactuals exist. Rather, it is simply an affirmation that employing them to explain the truth of counterfactuals of freedom is implausible.

Counterfactuals of freedom are therefore suspicious entities, according to Truthmaker. They are true propositions about non-actual entities yet they are also taken to be true propositions about the actual world that are not necessitated by, nor about, anything actual. Hence, if the conditions of Necessitation and Essential Dependence are not met, then Truthmaker ought to regard any class of propositions failing to meet these standards as ones that ontologically cheat. Molinists shouldn't be ontological cheaters, especially if they find the general or more specific truthmaking principles intuitive.

VII. Conclusion

Truthmaker, then, provides the anti-Molinist with a substantive Grounding objection insofar as the Truthmaking principles of Necessitation and Essential Dependence are plausibly defended. If we have good reason to accept these principles, then the Grounding objection to middle knowledge is not merely superficial, but is an important objection that the Molinist must answer. While the Grounding objection, as formulated by Hasker and Adams, is clearly insufficient, the theses of Necessitarianism and Essential Dependence, as I have shown, gives the Grounding objector the tools she needs to develop an objection of greater sophistication. Being a Molinist, I'm troubled by the truthmaking intuition, first because it seems right to me, and second because counterfactuals of freedom seem to violate principles that have become prominent in recent discussions of Truthmaker theory.

Works Cited

- Adams, Robert, "An Anti-Molinist Argument" in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343-353.
- . "Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in *Alvin Plantinga: A Profile*, ed. by James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen, Reidel, 1985.
- Armstrong, D.M., *Truth and Truthmaking* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).
- Bennett, Karen, "Truthmaking and Case-Making", forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Cameron, Ross, "Truthmakers", forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Truth*, edited by Michael Glanzberg, (Oxford: Oxford UP).
- Cowan, Steven, "The grounding objection to middle knowledge revisited," in *Religious Studies* 39 (2003): 93-102.
- Craig, William Lane, "Ducking Friendly Fire: Davison on the Grounding Objection," in *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 161-166.
- . "Middle Knowledge, Truth Makers, and the Grounding Objection," in *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 337-52.
- Davison, Scott, "Craig on the Grounding Objection to Middle Knowledge," in *Faith and Philosophy* 21 (2004): 365-369.
- De Molina, Luis, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988).
- Fine, Kit, "First Order Modal Theories III - Facts," in *Synthese* (1982) 53 (1): 43-122.
- Flint, Thomas, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998).
- Fox, John, "Truthmaker," in *Australian Journal of Philosophy* (1987) 65 (2): 188-207.
- Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith, Peter Simons, "Truth Makers" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44 (1984): 287-321.
- Lewis, David, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973).
- . "Truthmaking and Difference-Making" in *Nous* 35:4 (2001), 602-615.
- Lowe, E.J., "An essentialist approach to truth-making", in *Truth and Truthmaking* ed. by E.J. Lowe and Adolf Rami, McGill Queen's UP, 2009.
- Merricks, Trenton, *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).
- Molnar, George, "Truthmakers for Negative Truths," in *Australian Journal of Philosophy* (2000) 78 (1): 72-86.
- Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity*. Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
- Restall, Greg, "Truth-Makers, Entailment, and Necessity", in *Truth and*

Works Cited

- Truthmaking* ed. by E.J. Lowe and Adolf Rami, McGill Queen's UP, 2009.
- Schnieder, Benjamin, "Troubles with Truth-making: Necessitation and Projection", in *Erkenntnis* (2006) 64: 61-74.
- Smith, Barry, "Truthmaker Realism" in *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 77 (3), 1999, 274-291.