Trope theorists, not surprisingly, share the conviction that tropes (i.e. abstract particulars) belong to the ultimate furniture of reality. Besides being abstract and particular tropes are simple, but this (I believe essential characteristic) is not recognised by all trope theorists and has been attacked by several trope critics.¹²

Their core conviction aside, trope theories may differ considerably. Radically different are theories set in different theoretical frameworks. To see this, we need only consider the history of the theory. Early trope theorists treated the abstract particular as (one of) the ultimate constituents of experience.³ The majority of contemporary trope theorists, on the other hand, treat what may appear to be the very same thing as a constituent of reality as it

² It might be objected that my list of trope-traits is incomplete as it fails to mention that tropes are dependent entities (cf. Simons (1994)). As I am not convinced that tropes are essentially dependent entities, and as I do not believe that whether or not they are will make a difference here, I have opted to put dependence to one side.
³ Early trope theorists include Segelberg (1999 [1947]), Stout (1923), and Husserl (1970 [1900]). Williams (1953) similarly set his theory in an empiricist, if not full-blown phenomenological, framework. Of these theorists, only Williams named his abstract particulars “tropes” (it was in fact he who invented the name — presumably as a joke).
\[\hat{\alpha}\], independently of how it seems.\(^4\) To borrow useful terminology introduced by Strawson (1959: 9), contemporary trope theorists do \textit{revisionary} rather than descriptive metaphysics.\(^5\)\(^6\) With trope theory set in a contemporary framework we can ask:\(^7\)

Why should one hold that the world is a world of tropes?

It is impossible to assess an account of tropes without examining the theoretical framework within which that account was developed. Revisionary trope theory recognises a distinction (and hence the possibility of a difference) between \textit{appearance} and \textit{reality}. The goal of the revisionary trope theorist’s investigation, moreover, is an account of reality. The revisionary metaphysician wants to carve reality at the joints; its aim is a theory about “the thing in itself” and not only “the thing as it appears to us”. All of this brings with it well-known problems.

Appearances, first of all, can be deceptive, and it is hard to determine to what extent they are misleading and in what circumstances. Experiential evidence, therefore, becomes difficult to evaluate. This becomes apparent when we consider the possibility of systematic perceptual error. Even more troubling, perhaps, is the fact that experiential evidence supplied by our unaided senses may differ very much from that obtained with the help of various types


\(^5\) Strawson’s original distinction will not do as it stands; I return to its modification below. See also Maurin (2002: Ch. 3), Simons (1995; 1998) and Keinänen (2005: Ch. 2).

\(^6\) Both early and contemporary trope theorists, moreover, have regarded their theories as “formal” in character. All hold that we should expect it to provide information, not about the substance of reality, but rather about its form (i.e. about what categories there are, how distinct categories relate to one another, and so on). The claim that ontology, whether it is revisionary or descriptive, should be formal has been persuasively argued by Simons (1998: 38). See also Smith (2005: 156).

\(^7\) As this is the framework in which a majority of contemporary trope theories (along with quite a few other ontological theories) are set, the \textit{consequences} of its adoption will be of interest independently of the reason one might have for choosing it in the first place. I will not, therefore, attempt to defend setting trope theory in a revisionary framework – something which has in any case been defended by, among others, Simons (1998); Keinänen (2005) and to some extent by myself (Maurin (2002)). Lowe (2001) has even argued that ontology \textit{must} be revisionary in this sense because “to attempt to recast all ontological questions as questions about our thoughts about what exists is to engender a regress which is clearly vicious”.

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of machinery, such as a microscope or a telescope. In a revisionary framework, therefore, any argument that takes us directly from observation to ontology must be supplemented with elaborate and assumption-laden arguments explaining why such a move is justified.

Linguistic arguments – arguments from meaning – are also problematic, as it seems close to impossible to distinguish, in meaning, between what is ontologically relevant and what is not. Arguments from meaning are therefore shunned by almost all of today’s revisionary metaphysicians. Armstrong, for instance, rejects this type of argument when it is pressed into service to establish the existence of universals (1978, vol. 1: xiv):

This second argument moves from the existence of meaningful general words to the existence of universals which are the meanings of those words. Universals are postulated as the second term of the meaning relation … I regard this second line of argument as completely unsound. Furthermore, I believe that the identification of universals with meanings (connotations, intensions), which the argument presupposes, has been a disaster for the theory of universals.

Even arguments that take us from premises about (not meaning as such, but) the logical structure of our conceptualisations to conclusions about the ontological structure of reality draw criticism. For why should we believe that, although reality is both distinct and probably also different from the way we represent it, it just so happens that the logical form of the latter mirrors or exactly resembles the ontological form of the former? Once again, a convincing explanation is lacking. But if neither experience, nor language, nor thought can straightforwardly vindicate ontological conclusions, what can? Logic and the ordinary theoretical virtues are still available, of course. However (and unfortunately), their regulatory

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8 A case in point is the conflict we find in Armstrong (1978). Here he claims that, on the one hand, the main argument for the existence of universals is what he calls “the argument from the One over Many” (which, very briefly, runs as follows: the world seems to include identity in distinction – this must be explained – it cannot be explained away – the world does include identity in distinction – there are universals). On the other hand, Armstrong adopts a form of scientific realism (which, I take it, implies a type of revisionary framework); and there seems to be no reason to believe that a commitment to the existence of (scientific) universals will follow from belief that “universal” experiences exist. For more detailed argument here, see Maurin (2006).

9 Compare the logical atomism of Russell (1956) and Wittgenstein (1922). I return to this issue below.
impact is much too weak: an ontology regimented only by their means can hardly earn more than the status of being a “consistent but incredible fairy-tale” (Simons 1998: 381).

The revisionary metaphysician finds herself in a serious predicament – a predicament, moreover, considered by many to be a reductio of the revisionary framework itself. Her only option is to investigate once again if there is not, after all, something in appearance apt to inform her about the formal features of reality. She can defuse the reductio only if she can answer the following questions in a convincing way:

What in reality as it seems can inform us about reality as it is?
How can it so inform us?

In this paper I will argue that reasonable answers to both these questions are available. I will suggest that the now much discussed truthmaker theory, together with a modified version of what Strawson called descriptive metaphysics, can regiment ontological conclusions drawn in a revisionary framework enough to make them justified. The world is a world of tropes if (minimally) tropes can play the requisite truthmaking roles. The claim that tropes can play these roles I have argued for elsewhere (2002), and here those reasons can be rehearsed only cursorily. That they can does not mean that they do, however. That tropes can play the requisite truthmaking roles tells us merely that the world could be a world of tropes; it does not tell us why we should prefer a theory of tropes as truthmakers to a theory of, say, states of affairs. I end the paper with a discussion of the limits of theory comparison in revisionary ontology.

Truthmaker theory

According to truthmaker theory, truth conforms to principle (T):\(^{10,11}\)

\(^{10}\) (T) is not a definition of truth, as the notion appears also in its explanans. It could be regarded as a necessary and sufficient condition for truth, however. As much is suggested by Armstrong (2004: 17). Armstrong does not think
(T)  \(<p>\) is true iff there exists at least one truthmaker \(T\) for \(<p>\).\(^{12}\)

Whether or not (T) holds for all truths is disputed. Armstrong believes that it does (he calls this view “Truthmaker Maximalism”).\(^{13}\) Others are convinced that it does not and suggest that (T) be reserved for true atomic propositions and their conjunctive compounds. In general, truths conform instead to the weaker principle (T’):\(^{14}\)

(T’)  If there exists at least one truthmaker \(T\) for \(<p>\) then \(<p>\) is true

To be able to regiment, and hence to justify, revisionary trope theory, truthmaker theory must have independent support. Why should we believe that truths are made true? A first answer is this: it is reasonable to believe that truths are made true in the sense given by (T) and (T’) because this accords well with our intuitions about truth. What is true depends on what the world is like. Truth is “grounded” in reality. However, as noticed by Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005: 21):

that the fact that no definition of truth seems forthcoming is surprising, as “a fundamental concept such as truth is likely to be so entwined with other fundamental notions that no total explication of it in terms of other concepts is possible”. For some good discussions of (T) and (T’), see Beebee and Dodd (2005).

\(^{11}\)\(<p>\)’ = whatever carries a truth-value. Here I will talk of propositions as the bearers of truth, but I shall regard the expression as a place-holder for whatever detailed investigation reveals as the most appropriate truth-bearer. A similar approach is taken by Simons (1992), Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005) and Armstrong (2004).

\(^{12}\) That “at least one truthmaker” makes \(<p>\) true is consistent with there being one or many truthmakers (separately or jointly). The notion that a proposition is made true by several truthmakers jointly, moreover, does not entail that their union is anything “over and above” their constituent truthmakers (Mulligan, et al. 1984: 313).

\(^{13}\) Armstrong (2004: 5). Armstrong does not argue directly for Maximalism, but hopes that “philosophers of realist inclination will be immediately attracted by the idea that truth, any truth, should depend for its truth on something ‘outside’ it, in virtue of which it is true”.

\(^{14}\) Critics of Maximalism include Simons (2005: 254): “The most tendentious of Armstrong’s general truthmaking principles is Truthmaker Maximalism … It results from extending the plausible and attractive idea that some basic contingent truths are in need of something to make them true to the whole gamut of truths. In particular necessary truths are not usually thought to stand in need of truthmakers, since they are true come (or exist) what may. /…/ It is Armstrong’s insistence on looking for truthmakers for every truth that gets him into unnecessarily tight corners”. See also Smith (1999: 284-285).
The idea that truth is determined by reality sounds grand, but in itself it is a very minimal idea: it is simply the idea that the truth of a truthbearer is determined by its subject matter, or some feature of it – no matter what the nature of the subject matter may be.

We must add, therefore, that according to truthmaker theory, the reality in which truth is grounded is distinct from, and independent of, the truths it grounds. Truthmaker theory naturally belongs in a revisionary framework. The relationship between reality and what reality (or relevant portions of reality) grounds or makes true, furthermore, is importantly asymmetric. That truths are true *in virtue of* entities is the *core* idea of truthmaker theory (Rodriguez-Pereyra (2002: 32); Armstrong (2004: 5)).

To add that the reality in which truth is grounded is both distinct from, and independent of, the truths it grounds, and that it is portions of reality that determine truth but not the other way around, does not subtract from the intuitive attraction of truthmaker theory. Rather the opposite. However, these are substantive additions, and as such, they give rise to some difficult questions. In particular, one may wonder at the nature of a truthmaking relation that is able to bridge the supposed gulf between reality in itself and reality for us. The claim that the nature of the truthmaking relation is *primitive*, although true, does nothing to dispel this mystery. Demystification is instead more effectively achieved if truthmaking is compared with another relation: entailment. According to the basic truthmaker principle, if there is a truthmaker some truth *must* be (made) true. Truthmakers *necessitate* truth. In other words, if T is

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15 Both Rodriguez-Pereyra and Armstrong devote some time separating this core idea from another idea which in fact follows from it but should *not* be confused with it. This is the idea that *truth supervenes on being* (Bigelow, 1988). Supervenience, they point out, is a *symmetrical* relation, whereas the truthmaking relation is *asymmetric*. “Thus what is fundamental in the idea of truthmaking is not supervenience but the idea that truths are true *in virtue of* entities. That truth supervenes on being is a consequence of the fact that truths are true *in virtue of* entities, and this is why the supervenience of truth on being is important but the supervenience of being on truth is not” (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2002: 32).
a truthmaker for \(<p>\) then (\(<T \exists\) entails \(<p>\)). According to what is sometimes called the “entailment principle”, furthermore:  

\[(ET): \text{If } T \text{ makes true } <p> \text{ and } (<p> entails <q>) \text{ then } T \text{ makes true } <q>\]

The truthmaking relation is not, nor can it be reduced to, the entailment relation. Entailment is a logical relation that relates propositions; truthmaking is an ontological cross-categorial relation connecting entities to propositions. Hence, comparing the truthmaking relation with entailment can inform us only indirectly about one aspect of the former’s ontology. If there is a truthmaker \(T\) and a corresponding proposition \(<p>\), the truthmaking relation must exist. Truthmaking \textit{supervenes} on its relata. From an ontological perspective this means that truthmaking is an \textit{internal} relation. In ontology, furthermore, internal relations are often considered a bargain. For if the existence of the relata is enough to \textit{guarantee} (to necessitate) that relating obtains, then, in the name of ontological parsimony, no more than the relata must, fundamentally, exist. The truthmaking relation is a “pseudo addition”; it is an “ontological free lunch”. Moreover, those who remain (I believe, plausibly) sceptical about the move here made from internality to “no addition” can still agree that, although the truthmaking relation is no free lunch, its nature is not, after all, left entirely obscure.

Truthmaker theory is not only supported by intuition. The following, further reason for its adoption is perhaps more surprising, as it may seem at first to count against it. Deflationary theories of truth, it appears, offer an alternative yet ontologically much less

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16 Armstrong (2004: 11) points out that for (ET) to enjoy general applicability the entailment cannot be classical entailment, as that would make any contingent truth a truthmaker for any necessary truth – a consequence which “robs truthmaking theory of all interest for the case of necessary truths”. Suggestions on how to restrict entailment have been made by Restall (1996), Read (2000) and Rodriguez-Pereyra (2001), among others.

17 Propositions may also be part of reality. If that is so, I do not mean to deny that the truthmaking relation can hold between propositions; I only wish to deny that it is a “propositional” relation.

expensive theory of truth. Like truthmaker theory (although in a much weaker sense) they ground truth in reality. Unlike truthmaker theory, they account for truth without truthmakers and without mysterious truthmaking relations. To see how the availability of a successful deflationary theory of truth can nevertheless be made to count in favour of truthmaker theory, consider the Tarskian schema (disquotationally interpreted): \(<p>\) is true iff \(p\). It can be argued that this schema does not fully explicate truth – although it does of course explicate it just enough to meet the needs of a formal semantics. What is lacking, furthermore, is precisely what truthmaker theory is able to supply. As Niiniluoto says (2004: 66):

Some philosophers suggest that everything relevant to this issue, as far as semantics is concerned, is expressed by Tarski’s \(T\)-equivalences /…/ [This] may be right in the sense that \(T\)-sentences are sufficient for the purpose of stating and generating actual truth-conditions for all sentences, and the set-theoretical approach as such is compatible with various philosophical and metaphysical accounts of the nature of reality. But many philosophers nevertheless find it frustrating if we cannot understand the nature of predication employed in simple atomic statements /…/ To analyze these problems, set-theoretical semantics should be complemented by some ontological considerations.

Truthmaker theory is, for the reasons just given, a plausible theory possessing independent support from sources other than those having to do with its regimenting role.

How does truthmaker theory regiment?

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19 Versions of the type of theory I have in mind have been defended by G. Frege; F. P. Ramsey; A. J. Ayer; W. V. O. Quine; H. Field and P. Horwich. Deflationary theories of truth, I imagine, minimally share the conviction that someone has the concept of truth only if he or she accepts all (non-paradoxical) instances of the schema \(<p>\) is true iff \(p\).

20 Lewis (2001: 603) similarly contests the view that deflationary theories of truth puncture “the big, interesting claims made by rival theories of truth such as correspondence theory, the coherence theory, the pragmatic theory, or what have you”. Substantial and deflationary theories not only can “co-exist peacefully”, but (and here Lewis has the company of Niiniluoto) should. Similar arguments appear in Mulligan, et al. (1984: 288-89), Simons (1992:159) and Putnam (1978: 25 ff.).
Truthmaker theory regiments, and hence justifies, revisionary theorising by explaining and making plausible the “leap” from appearance to reality on which such theorising depends. It informs us, moreover, about what, in appearance, should concern the revisionary metaphysician: the true propositions. True propositions are importantly and relevantly concerned with reality as they are made true by it. But, what exactly can true propositions tell us about the fundamental structure of reality? In trying to answer this question, it is instructive to compare truthmaker theory with its near relative, correspondence theory.21

Correspondence theory, like truthmaker theory, “grounds” truth in a distinct and independent reality; and according to both theories it is possible to identify a basic stock of “truth atoms” by studying and logically analysing known truths (whether they are mathematical, scientific or everyday truths). Atomic truths are ontologically significant, since they are made true by, or correspond to, reality directly. Molecular propositions, by contrast, have a truth value that depends entirely on the truth value of their constituents, and on the manner in which these are (logically) combined. Molecular propositions consequently require no special truthmakers but can sponge off the truthmakers of their constituent atomic propositions. This “logical atomism” regiments ontological theorising by once again restricting its relevant object of study. Reality minimally contains whatever is required for the truth of the logically atomic propositions. It is therefore only by studying these, and not molecular truths, that information about the fundamental structural features of reality can be procured.22

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21 By “correspondence theory” I here intend the type of theory proposed in *inter alia* Russell (1956) and Wittgenstein (1922). As both Russell and Wittgenstein later abandoned strong and simple correspondence theory (Wittgenstein completely, Russell less radically and variably over time), the correspondence theory here discussed should be cautiously described as “Russellian” or “Wittgensteinian”.

22 Much effort has been spent investigating, criticising or trying to save logical atomism in its most general form. Contemporary critics include Cox (1997), Gregory (2001) and Milne (2005). Logical atomism is defended by Simons (1992; 2005), Smith (2002) and Rodriguez-Pereyra (2002). It is especially the negative and universally quantified propositions that seem to resist the prescribed variety of logical analysis. The questions raised in this debate are both many and interesting, but I will, for the purposes of this paper, disregard them. If it turns out that
What sets correspondence and truthmaker theory apart is that, according to the former, the logical analysis of known truths reveals much more than what are the ultimate truthbearing units. According to the correspondence theory’s “mirror thesis”, once the atomic propositions have been identified, their logical structure (which is hidden beneath their grammatical structure) will mirror the ontological structure of that portion of reality to which they correspond. “Propositions show the logical form of reality”, says Wittgenstein (1922: 4.121). Again: “The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather, they represent it” (ibid. 6.124). It is because correspondence theory assumes an isomorphism between the logical structure of propositions and the ontological structure of reality that its regimentation is both strong and transparent.

23 In the framework of the correspondence theory, it is precisely those categories disclosed by logical analysis that ought to be posited in ontology.

Logical atomism can be portrayed as a “two-tiered system” (Simons, 1992: 158). Its first tier involves identification of the \textit{formally} atomic propositions – the atoms of our conceptualisations – by means of logical, conceptual and linguistic analysis. To obtain the second tier, not only formally, but also \textit{substantially}, atomic propositions must be identified. Substantially atomic propositions are those that are made true by entities that are likewise

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not all molecular propositions can have their truth determined in the way prescribed by logical atomism, this will add to, and probably complicate, the explanatory task for a theory set in a truthmaker theoretical framework. Whatever the consequences for individual theories, however, finding out that logical atomism does not hold generally will make no difference to the regimenting capacity of truthmaker (or correspondence) theory.

23 Unveiling the correct logical form of propositions may, of course, be both complicated and highly controversial. Consider e.g. Ramsey’s argument against the distinction between universals and particulars (1925). Ramsey, it seems to me, agreed with Russell on the fundamentals of logical atomism (at least, for the purposes of this argument). They disagreed, however, over the correct logical analysis of the atomic propositions. According to Russell, atomic propositions are constituted by terms of two types that are not only grammatically but also logically different. According to Ramsey, atomic propositions \textit{do} consist of two sorts of term, yet \textit{anything} there is can serve the function of either term. Consequently, the linguistic complexity in question is merely grammatical, not logical, and does not require a corresponding complexity in its truthmakers. Without the mirror thesis, the view that there is no distinction between particulars and universals could not earn support from the claim that there is no distinction between subject and predicate. See also: Maurin (2005b).
“atomic”. With the mirror thesis added to logical atomism, formally and substantially atomic propositions coincide. Adding the mirror thesis is equivalent to saying that “if a sentence has or could have more than one truth-maker, then it is logically complex” (Mulligan, et al. 1984: 298-99). It is this running together of formally and substantially atomic propositions that renders the correspondence theory less suitable for regimenting ontological theorising. It simply does not seem very plausible to suppose that, although they are distinct and possibly different, the structural features of reality and the structural features of atomic truths as represented in classical first-order predicate logic coincide. With the mirror thesis in place, moreover, substantial ontological disagreement appears to be ruled out and replaced instead by disagreement over the proper analysis of the logical form of propositions.

Luckily, the distinction between formally and substantially atomic propositions can be preserved; and if it is, the substantially atomic propositions will form only a privileged subset of the formally atomic propositions. To illustrate this, consider the (let us suppose) formally atomic proposition <This is red>. Given the science of colour, it seems reasonable to suppose that although it is formally atomic, this proposition will nevertheless require complexity of its truthmakers. Formally atomic propositions, consequently, can turn out to be substantially complex; and whether or not they are cannot be decided with recourse only to logical analysis. To hold that formal and substantial atomicity come apart is to hold that logical and ontological form come apart, and hence to reject the mirror thesis. As this is the avenue chosen by the truthmaker theorist, she cannot, like the correspondence theorist, be accused of regimenting revisionary theorising too rigidly. As Mulligan, et al. (1984: 298) state:

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24 Armstrong refers to the mirror thesis as the “bane of correspondence theory” (2004: 16). Smith (2005: 153) calls it “a dark force” which “haunts much of what is most admirable in the philosophy of the last hundred years”.

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Here, in contrast, we uphold the independence of ontological from logical complexity: Ontologically complex objects (those having proper parts) are not for that reason also in some way logically complex, any more than there is reason to suppose that to every logically complex (true) sentence there corresponds an ontologically complex entity which makes it true.

Unfortunately, rejection of the mirror thesis has left a hole, and unless this hole is somehow plugged it will be complained, rightly, that the theory is unable to regiment ontological theorising enough. There is no “royal road” to truthmakers, and that is a good thing; but to be able to regiment, the truthmaker theory must offer us some road. What does the truthmaker theory offer in place of the correspondence-theoretical mirror thesis?

This is the short answer: although there is no royal road from truths to truthmakers, studying the one will give us some information about the other. In particular, the atomic propositions inform us about the truthmaking roles that the entities posited in our favoured ontology should be able to play. As Read (2000: 67) says:

Rather than enter into a detailed metaphysics of the nature of truthmakers, the theory of truthmaking works top-down by explicating the roles which truthmakers play – by formulating the postulates they must satisfy.

Ontological theorising in accordance with truthmaker theory, then, first involves the identification of the formally atomic propositions. Let us suppose that these include (at least) propositions of the following three forms:

- Subject-predicate propositions (<This is red>)
- Identity propositions (<Mary is Mary>)
- Singular existential propositions (<Mary exists>).\(^{25}\)

It next involves thinking about the roles that whatever there is must, minimally, be able to play for these types of proposition to be true. Role identification is sometimes relatively

\(^{25}\) I have argued elsewhere (Maurin (2002: 57-58)) that the list of formally atomic proposition should include what I have called “comparative” propositions (“a is the same F as b”). It could be argued (as well it has been) that comparative propositions are not atomic, but rather complex propositions (“a is F” and “b is F”). This is Rodriguez-Pereyra’s view (2002: 39). I shall not pursue this matter here.
straightforward – as when singular existential propositions like <Mary exists> are said to require for their truth something playing the roles normally associated with the concrete particular. Sometimes, however, it is more difficult. A case in point is the rudimentary subject-predicate proposition – propositions like <This is red>. Here opinions are divided between those who believe that truthmaking requires us to posit truthmakers capable of playing the roles we associate with the abstract universal (Hochberg, 2004) and those who argue instead that no more than the roles we associate with tropes is required (see my 2002)). On reflection, moreover, it may turn out that the atomic propositions should be further subdivided in ways that relevantly reflect differences in the roles their truthmakers must be able to play. This appears to be true, for instance, of propositions of the subject-predicate form:

- Simple predicative propositions (<This is red>)
- Second order predicative propositions (<Red is a colour>)
- Kind predicative propositions (<Mary is a human being>)
- Substantially predicative propositions (<The human being is an animal>)

Truthmaker theory regiments by singling out propositions whose examination will reveal what roles the relevant truthmakers must be able to play if their inclusion in ontology is to be justified. But this is only to say that the regimenting burden has shifted from the meticulous unveiling of hidden logical structures to the proper identification of truthmaking roles. To say that the truthmaker for <Mary exists> must be able to play the roles associated with concrete particulars is not to properly explain what its truth really requires. What roles are those? What does identifying them entail? How is their identification regimented?

Together, these questions require a long answer; and only a small portion of that answer could refer to a study of the formal features of the atomic propositions. This portion would concern the role of entailment. For, given the entailment thesis, if a truthmaker makes true <p>, it also and necessarily, makes true all the propositions (relevantly) entailed by <p>.
To understand and properly identify the roles our truthmakers must be able to play will involve understanding how complex roles break down into simpler ones, and how different roles relate to one another. Here, knowing what a proposition entails will, of course, be valuable. However, entailment is far from powerful enough to be our only source for such information. As pointed out by Armstrong, the truthmaking relation seems to hold in many cases where entailment is completely lacking (2004: 6):

Suppose that it is true that there exists a certain quantity of water in a certain place at a certain time. Will not a sufficiently dense conglomeration of $H_2O$ molecules in that space at that time be a truthmaker for this truth? It seems to me that we ought to accept such truthmakers. But if we replace this truthmaker, as we can do easily enough, with a truth of existence, this truth does not entail the first truth.

If we wish to identify the relevant truthmaking roles, continued formal examination of the atomic propositions, however fastidious, will not do. Something else is needed, but what? Consider, again, the (true) atomic proposition <Mary exists>. It requires for its truth the existence of something playing the roles normally associated with concrete particulars. To find out more about these roles, it seems that we must consult not only logic, or language, but also sources like common sense or mature science. To be able to start doing revisionary metaphysics in a justified and well regimented way, it now seems that another philosophical investigation must already be finished – an investigation, that is to say, issuing in the formulation of a coherent account of what there seems to be according to our different and partly conflicting conceptions of reality. This is an enterprise very much like Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics (1959: 9-10):

How should [descriptive metaphysics] differ from what is called philosophical, or logical, or conceptual analysis? It does not differ in kind of intention, but only in scope and generality. Aiming to lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure, it can take far less for

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26 For an interesting discussion of the relationship between metaphysics and science, see Hawley (2006).
granted than a more limited and partial conceptual inquiry. Hence, also, a certain difference in method. Up to a point, the reliance upon a close examination of the actual use of words is the best, and indeed the only sure, way in philosophy. But the discriminations we make, and the connexions we can establish in this way, are not general enough and not far-reaching enough to meet the full metaphysical demand for understanding.

To “meet the full metaphysical demand for understanding”, the descriptive enterprise is extended. This, I believe, is why Strawson’s own characterisation of the descriptive enterprise as “content to describe the structure of our actual thought about the world” (as opposed to the revisionary enterprise which is “concerned to produce a better structure”) is misleading. In trying to lay bare the core-structural features of appearance, and in attempting to harmonise and make consistent different ways in which the world appears to us, we shall probably find recourse to revision necessary. If, for instance, we find that the way our best science describes the world has earned it a special status among our many and various conceptual schemes, the result may be a descriptive metaphysics that is, according to (say) our everyday conception of the world, partly in conflict with appearances.

It is the descriptive metaphysician’s job to identify and characterise the truthmaking roles and the revisionary metaphysician’s job to supply truthmakers able to play them (cf. Keinänen, 2005: 74 ff). This occasions another modification of the Strawsonian distinction between the descriptive and the revisionary enterprise. Not only can descriptive metaphysics be revisionary, but it also seems that revisionary metaphysics in a certain sense cannot. The truthmaking roles identified in descriptive metaphysics regiment the revisionary enterprise. They constitute the starting point for revisionary theorising, as well as the background against which evaluation and justification proceeds.

Truthmaker theory is able to justify revisionary theorising just enough because, when it is added to a descriptive metaphysics concerned with identifying truthmaking roles, it licenses our drawing conclusions from the results of the descriptive investigation to ontology. The fact
that whatever we posit in our revisionary ontology must be able to play the truthmaking roles identified by descriptive metaphysics is what makes ontology relevantly concerned with reality as we know it.

**Tropes as truthmakers**

Revisionary trope theory holds that the world is a world of tropes. The theory is justified if tropes can play the truthmaking roles identified in descriptive metaphysics. That there is still controversy over exactly which roles to include in the revisionary “must-do” list is not surprising. In fact, as much should be expected given the intricate and extensive investigation their identification entails. That there is no finalised list of truthmaking roles does not mean that we cannot propose or evaluate a revisionary ontology. To be able to do that, we need merely a provisional list of truthmaking roles. Such a list, I take it, will include some of the roles associated with two categories that are obviously implicated by the truth of some (perhaps all) of the atomic propositions: the category of concrete particulars and the category of abstract universals.

To say that the world’s truthmakers should include concrete particulars, let us suppose, is to demand that the world’s truthmakers include entities capable of fulfilling (at least) the following truthmaking functions: (i) they should be able to change over time while retaining their identity; (ii) they should be able to monopolise their position in space-time (i.e. no other entity of the same kind should be able to occupy exactly the same position); and (iii) they should not be able to exist at more than one place in space at one moment in time.

To say that the world’s categories should include abstract universals is to demand that the truthmakers of one’s choice simultaneously be capable of fulfilling (at least) the following functions: (i) they should not monopolise their place in space time (i.e. more than one entity of the same kind should be able to occupy the same position in space time); and (ii) they should
be shareable (i.e. they should be able to characterise, or be true of, more than one entity at one time).

These are highly provisional lists, but evaluation of the prospects for revisionary trope theory does not require much else. In fact, it is enough if the trope theorist concentrates on only two of these roles – roles that appear particularly problematic from a trope-theoretical perspective. Concrete objects are complex entities that monopolise their place in space and time. Tropes are not concrete in this sense, and an explanation of how a world of only tropes can nevertheless supply truthmakers that are able to play the concreteness role must be produced. Universals, furthermore, are shareable. If everything is particular, some elaborate story telling us how what is particular can nevertheless give rise to what is shareable must be supplied. That trope theory can provide a satisfactory explanation of the emergence of at least these roles I have argued in depth elsewhere (2002). Here I can only indicate how the required explanations might look, and why I believe criticism of them can be handled in a satisfactory manner.

The role associated with so-called abstract universals, first. From the perspective of a one-category trope theory, the question becomes: how can there be anything universal when all that exists is particular? If the world is a world of tropes, the shared nature of concrete objects boils down to the shared nature of the tropes that characterise them individually. From a trope-theoretical perspective, therefore, the fundamental question is this: what makes it true that two or more distinct tropes, each with their own particular qualitative character, can also be said to share this character?

A reasonable trope-theoretical answer is that tropes share a nature by (exactly) resembling each other. Exact resemblance is an equivalence relation that will partition the entire field of tropes without residue or overlap. Equivalence classes play the role of the universal – they are “ersatz universals” (Campbell, 1990). Resemblance, moreover, is an
internal relation; and to some observers, as we have seen, this means that it can partition the field of tropes without being added to the ontology – it is a free lunch. But even if one is unwilling to agree that what is internal is a free lunch, resemblance manages to explain how what is particular can play the universality role.

Adding resemblance while still respecting the basic theses of trope theory, it has been objected, forces the trope theorist to recognise the relation as yet another trope, a recognition that gives rise to the famous Russelian resemblance regress (Russell: 1956).\textsuperscript{27} Now the type of theory against which this regress argument was originally formulated admitted only the existence of \textit{concrete} particulars, and argued that to \textit{have} a property was for a concrete particular to resemble an \textit{exemplar} to a suitable degree, whilst for two objects to \textit{share} a property was for them to resemble \textit{the same} exemplar, once again to a suitable degree (Russell, 1956: 111):

The general term ‘white’, in this view, is defined for a given person at a given moment by a particular patch of white which he sees or imagines; another patch is called white if it has exact likeness in colour to the standard patch. In order to avoid making the colour a universal, we have to suppose that ‘exact likeness’ is a simple relation, not analysable into a community of predicates; moreover, it is not the general relation of likeness that we require, but a more special relation, that of colour-likeness, since two patches might be exactly alike in shape or size but different in colour.

It is to avoid making the relation of colour-likeness universal that the same analysis as was previously applied to the property shared by distinct objects must now be applied to it: “we may take a standard particular case of colour-likeness, and say that anything else is to be called a colour-likeness if it is exactly like our standard case” (ibid.). This leads to an infinite regress which, according to Russell, is “plainly vicious”.

\textsuperscript{27}Whether a regress is also generated if resemblance is regarded as a “free lunch” is disputable. However, for present purposes it does not matter either way. If no regress is generated, there is no problem. If a regress is generated, it is virtuous – so, again, there is no problem.
Trope theory can be the target of a similar argument. To illustrate, imagine three objects sharing the property of being red. Sharing a property, says the trope theorist, amounts to the *exact resemblance* of the three red-tropes characterising each of the three red objects individually. But if there are only tropes, exact resemblance is a trope. Consequently, for each class of exactly resembling tropes, there will be one resemblance-trope uniting its members. Moreover, all resemblance-tropes will be *the same*. As it has already been decided that to be the same is to be related by exact resemblance, the sameness of the exact resemblance-tropes will force into existence a second “level” of exact resemblance tropes. Resemblance-tropes that hold between resemblances are (also) the same – they are resemblances. That is to say (as above) that there will be resemblance-tropes holding between the resemblance-tropes, and so at the next level, and at the next, *ad infinitum*.

On the face of it, Russell’s original resemblance regress and its trope-theoretical counterpart look exactly the same. The trigger, in both cases, is the state of affairs that ‘a exactly resembles b’. One difference is, of course, that on the view criticised by Russell *a* and *b* are concrete objects, whereas the basic question for trope theory will concern the exact resemblance of tropes. The *relevant* difference is not this one, however. What is relevant is instead a difference in the direction of dependence that characterises each kind of regress. According to the view criticised by Russell, for an object to have a property is for it to be exactly like the object serving as a standard for that property. According to trope theory, on the other hand, for an object to have a property is for it to contain a trope. Tropes belong to classes of exactly similar tropes, and because objects contain tropes they, too, form classes based on their likeness in certain respects. However, and in contrast with the view criticised by Russell, these objects do not have properties *because* they belong to a particular similarity class. Instead, they belong to a particular similarity class *because* they have some properties – the tropes – which, as it were, “are” their primitive nature. In the view criticised by Russell, it is a
condition of the trigger – a exactly resembles b – existing, or obtaining, that the existence of the similarity class to which the exact similarity holding between a and b belongs also exists, and so on for each new level of exact similarity. In the trope theory case, however, the existence of the very same trigger requires no more than the existence of tropes a, b and their resemblance. The fact that the view criticised by Russell requires, for the existence of the trigger, that the next step of the regress should exist, and so on, ad infinitum makes this regress vicious. The trope-theoretical regress exhibits the opposite direction of dependence; and therefore the infinite regress does not prevent the trigger from existing. It is rather the existence of the trigger that sets into motion the infinite generation of exact resemblance tropes. The trope-theoretical resemblance regress is, therefore, infinite but virtuous. It is like the truth regress and other well known virtuous regresses.

The roles associated with concrete particulars, next, seem problematic from the perspective of a one-category trope theory, because tropes are abstract entities that do not, for one thing, monopolise their place in space time. Once again, relations come to the rescue here. It is possible for the world to contain concrete things that are apt to make propositions like <Mary exists> true, says the trope theorist, because tropes in compresence give rise to concrete particulars. (If enough tropes are congregated, the result, it is supposed, will be what Husserl called a “pregnant whole”.)

This suggestion struggles with a notorious problem: the Bradley regress. Suppose that something rather simpler than Mary exists – imagine, for example, that <the ball exists> is true. Suppose, furthermore, that the ball is constituted by its roundness (r), its yellowness (y) and its weighing 0.5 kilos (w). According to the trope-theoretical suggestion, the roles we associate with whatever makes <the ball exists> true cannot be played by r, y and w individually. They can, however, be played by the whole they form if they are related by compresence. Compresence, unlike resemblance, is an external relation: a world that contains r,
\( y \) and \( w \) does not have to contain the ball. Adding compresence makes a difference.\(^{28}\) If the world is a world of tropes, moreover, compresence must be yet another trope. But why, if the existence of our original tropes was not enough to account for their unity, should the addition of one more trope suddenly do the trick? Compresence, it seems, could exist without relating anything. Alternatively, if this possibility is denied – if one holds, plausibly it would seem, that relations must relate something – it will follow that compresence could exist and not relate \( r, y \) and \( w \). To make sure, therefore, that the addition of compresence does the work for which it was intended, something must again be added. What unites \( r, y \), and \( w \) with compresence? The answer seems as unavoidable as it is problematic: another trope of compresence – and so the regress is up and running.\(^{29}\) The unity of \( r, y \) and \( w \) depends on their being compresent. What the Bradley regress shows is that adding relation does not result in the requisite unity; instead it just pushes us one step further up the regressive ladder, making each step depend on the next. The Bradley regress, consequently, exhibits a dependence pattern of the vicious kind.

Although this situation is, admittedly, serious, all is not lost for the trope theorist. A way out is to affirm what Bradley denies: to insist, that is, that relations are different from their relata, and that they are different in precisely the sense that they relate whereas their relata do not. I have suggested in previous work (2002: 163-166) that this difference can be spelled out in terms of dependence. The difference between a monadic property and a relation, I suggest, is that a relation, although its existence is contingent (that is, it might or might not exist), must,

\(^{28}\) Notice that to be able to generate this regress we must agree that the relation in question is external. I have argued that one should regard compresence as an external relation in Maurin (2002: 129-134). Not everyone agrees, however. (Most notably Simons (1994) does not.) I will not argue for the externality of compresence here.

\(^{29}\) This is how Bradley originally put it (1908: 23): “The relation \( C \) has been admitted different from \( A \) and \( B \), and no longer is predicated of them. Something, however, seems to be said of this relation \( C \), and said, again, of \( A \) and \( B \). And this something is not to be the ascription of one to the other. If so, it would appear to be another relation, \( D \), in which \( C \), on the one side, and, on the other side, \( A \) and \( B \) stand. But such a makeshift leads at once to the infinite process. The new relation \( D \) can be predicated in no way of \( C \), or of \( A \) and \( B \); and hence we must have recourse to a fresh relation \( E \), which comes between \( D \) and whatever we had before. But this must lead to another \( F \); and so on indefinitely”.

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if it exists, relate exactly the entities it in fact relates. In other words, every relation is specifically dependent on the entities it relates. This is true while, on the other hand, the related entities are not likewise dependent on the existence of the relation in question (unless, of course, the relation is internal); so the specific dependence is one way. To put the point another way, relations are external to the entities they relate, but at the same time the related entities are internal to the relation. This suggestion manages to both respect our intuitions about relations as something other than their relata and provide an ontologically sound account of this difference. It is however a controversial suggestion that has generated some criticism (Trettin, 2004b; Hochberg, 2004). Fortunately, the success of trope theory does not necessarily depend on it, as alternative solutions have been devised, and, I am sure, others remain to be formulated (Simons, 1994; Keinänen, 2005).

Why should one hold that the world is a world of tropes?

Although some problems and many details remain to be worked out, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that the entities posited in a one-category trope theory could play the requisite truthmaking roles. Suppose even that it had been firmly established that they could. Would it follow that one should hold that the world is a world of tropes? Unfortunately not. Noting that tropes can fulfil their truthmaking function does not discriminate trope theory from rival revisionary ontologies — unless, of course, and very implausibly, the posited entities of no other ontology were able, likewise, to fulfil this function. There is still room for wondering whether or not the world is a world of tropes rather than states of affairs, concrete objects, Platonic forms or whatever else is apt to play the truthmaking roles.

That reasons traditionally cited for holding that the world is a world of tropes are inadequate should come as no surprise. Such reasons include arguments from experience (“What we primarily see of the moon, for example, is its shape and color and not at all its whole
concrete bulk” (Williams, 1953: 16)); from causality (“When you drop it, it is the weight of this particular brick, not bricks or weights in general, which breaks the bone in your particular left big toe” (Campbell, 1990: 113)); from evaluation (“Evaluation is similarly focussed on abstracta. What most men value the moon for is its brightness; what a child wants of a lollipop is a certain flavour and endurance” (Williams, ibid.)); and from language (Mulligan, et al. 1984: 296): 30

The clue that moments may serve as truth-makers comes initially from linguistic considerations. Most terms which describe moments, or under which moments fall, are in fact nouns formed by nominalisation of verbs and verb-phrases.

Some of these arguments cite perfectly respectable reasons for holding that the world is a world of tropes if trope theory is developed in a framework other than the revisionary one. Regrettably, however, these reasons cannot be called upon to the same effect by the revisionary metaphysician. 31

We find ourselves at a crossroad very much like the one at which we first asked how conclusions in revisionary ontology can be justified if there is no substantial evidence on which they can rely. I have argued since then that there is some such evidence after all, and that justification is therefore forthcoming. We now ask the similar question: how can we justifiably decide between rival ontological theories if there is no substantial arbitrator available? We cannot, however, answer this question in the same vein as we answered our first question. The theories up for comparison have already made use of what evidence, derived from appearance,

30 See also Moltmann (2004; to appear).
31 From the quote above, it may appear that Mulligan, Simons and Smith argue inappropriately in this sense. However, after claiming that language is at least to some extent a reason to hold that the world is a world of tropes, they add: “This simplest possible version of the theory is inadequate as it stands, however … because the theory which claims that by nominalising a sentence we have thereby designated the relevant truth-maker can hardly count as a substantial elucidation of making true. It seems – like Tarski’s theory – to turn on a linguistic trick” (Mulligan (1984: 297)).
they are allowed. They are all *ex hypothesi* theories positing entities that are equally apt to fulfil their truthmaking function. This time, therefore, the ordinary theoretical virtues will provide the only basis on which we can make our decision, and even some of those are unavailable. The explanatory value of rival theories, for instance, must, again *ex hypothesi*, be the same. Simplicity, it seems, must play a decisive role (and *prima facie* it appears to count in favour of a one-category theory of tropes). But simplicity is a complicated thing. We must ask ourselves what type of simplicity we should prefer and why. The fact that we are obliged, when choosing between theories that are equally apt to provide truthmakers, to appeal merely to (some of) the theoretical virtues is not as bad as it would have been if we had been forced to appeal to these virtues alone when we faced our first predicament, however. The theories to be compared, we assume, are independently justified. They all feature entities that relevantly and adequately fulfil their truthmaker-theoretical function. They are *not* “consistent but incredible fairy-tales”.

To sum up, revisionary theorising can be justified if one agrees that truths are made true by portions of reality, and that, by studying known truths in descriptive metaphysics, the roles we should expect our truthmakers to play can be identified. To justify revisionary theorising *more* theory is consequently needed. The revisionary metaphysician asks about the fundamental constitution of reality as it *is*, independently of how it seems, but cannot, for obvious reasons, get beyond discoveries about the way the world *seems* to us, on our best evidence. There is no view from nowhere. This is why the revisionary enterprise is a hypothetical enterprise. *If* truth is determined by reality, and *if* descriptive metaphysics can uncover the requisite truthmaking roles, *then*… Revisionary ontology set in this type of framework, furthermore, is *only* concerned with truth and with coming up with entities fit to

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32 Cf. Armstrong (1997), in which it is argued that trope theory is worse off than universal realism because it must (and universal realism need not) posit primitive axioms of resemblance.
play the roles required by truth. This means that such ontology is relevantly concerned with reality as it seems to us, but also that it is concerned only with one aspect of this reality: truth. It is because revisionary ontology is, in this sense, underdetermined by appearance that the comparison of theories, once the otherwise equivalent revisionary ontologies have been formulated, becomes a less interesting affair. In a revisionary framework the interesting and difficult philosophical questions are *intra* rather than *inter*-theoretical. If reality is constituted by tropes (or, by states of affairs, or universals, or particulars, or some such) what does this entail? What problems does the choice of this or that ontology engender, and how are these problems best solved? This is the “hypothetical stance” which, from a revisionary point of view, is the only interesting stance to take.

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