

Removing an Inconsistency from Jago's Theory of Truth

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Abstract: I identify an inconsistency in Jago's theory of truth. I show that Jago is committed to the identity of the proposition that the proposition that A is true and the proposition that A. I show that Jago is committed to the proposition that A being true because A if the proposition that A is true. I show that these two commitments, given the rest of Jago's theory, entail a contradiction. I show that while the latter commitment follows from Jago's theory of truth, even by Jago's own lights he should not be committed to the identity of the proposition that the proposition that A is true and the proposition that A.


Keywords: Truth; truthmaking; proposition; state of affairs; explanation; redundancy.

1. Preliminaries

Jago thinks that to be true is to be made true by something (2018, e.g. 1, 74, 81). He thinks that the primary bearers of truth and falsity are propositions (2018, e.g. 5, 235, 316). He thinks that propositions are sets of their truthmakers ((2017); (2018, e.g. 249–252); (2022)). Ignoring subtle

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Jago exegesis,¹ he thinks that a truthmaker for a proposition is a state of affairs which, were it to exist, would make the proposition true ((2018, 81, 261–266); (2022, 231)). I take these to be Jago’s core commitments regarding truth and propositions.

A note on notation: ‘A’ is used, as in (Jago 2018), as a variable or meta-variable; ‘ $\langle A \rangle$ ’ is an abbreviation of ‘the proposition that A’; ‘ $\lceil A \rceil$ ’ is an abbreviation of ‘the state of affairs that A’; ‘P’ is an abbreviation of ‘Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic’; and ‘[’ and ‘]’ are used for editing and supplementing text.

2. Contradiction!

On the basis of what Jago has written, he is committed to the following argument being sound:²

1. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle = \langle P \rangle$. [See §2.1 and §3]
 2. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.
[[$\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is true & Jago’s theory]
 3. $\langle P \rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true. [1, 2, & Jago’s theory]
 4. $\langle P \rangle$ is true but not because $\langle P \rangle$ is true. [Assumption]
- \perp [3 & 4]

The argument cannot be sound, of course, because its conclusion is a contradiction. In the following four subsections I explain why Jago is committed to the truth of each of the premises. In §3 I show that even by Jago’s own lights he should never have committed himself to the truth of Premise 1.

¹ For those interested in such things, consult e.g. (Jago 2017, 295) and (Jago 2018, 250, 261–266).

² Similar arguments, not directed at Jago specifically, have been given by Trueman (2022, 104) and Künne (2018, 51).

2.1 Premise 1

Jago commits himself to the truth of Premise 1 in the following passage from *What Truth Is*:

Given our analysis of *being true*, $\langle\langle A \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is identical to the existential proposition $\langle\exists x x \text{ truthmakes } \langle A \rangle\rangle$, which we identify with the set of all its witnesses: all truthmakers for $\langle A \rangle$. So $\langle\langle A \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is identical to $\langle A \rangle$ itself. (Jago 2018, 251–52)

2.2 Premise 2

Regarding Premise 2, consider the following passage from *What Truth Is*:

Here's [a] platitude about truth, governing our use of 'is true': [if $\langle A \rangle$ is true, then] $\langle A \rangle$ is true because A (Wright 1992, 25–6; Lynch 2001, 747). (Or rather, any instance of that scheme is a platitude, wherever $\langle A \rangle$ is a proposition.) ... underlying the monadic existential property *having a truthmaker* is the binary relation — *truthmakes* —. An entity x stands in its first argument place when the proposition in the second argument place is true in virtue of x 's existence. This 'in virtue of' is used canonically to express metaphysical explanations. We may replace 'is true in virtue of x 's existence' with 'is true because x exists'. And there we have our explanation for the platitude... (Jago 2018, 75–76)

Jago is committed to the following proposition being true:

If $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true, then $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.

Given that Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic, $\langle P \rangle$ is true. Given that $\langle P \rangle$ is true, $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true. Hence Jago is committed to the truth of Premise 2:

2. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.

One might wonder whether Jago should have been committed to the truth of Premise 2. I think, partly on the basis of the passage just quoted, that Jago's theory of truth and $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ entail the truth of Premise 2; in order to explain why I think this, I shall present an argument the soundness

of which I think Jago was committed to and whose conclusion, given the truth of $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$, entails Premise 2. In formulating this argument, I have benefitted from Liggins' understanding of the quoted passage (Liggins 2019).

There are five suppositions under which the conclusion shall be derived.

Supposition I

If $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is true, then something makes $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ true.

Jago thinks that if something is true then it is made true by something (2018, ch.3). So Jago is committed to the truth of this supposition. In fact, Jago thinks that for something to be true just is for it to be made true by something (§1). So he is definitely committed to the truth of this supposition.

Supposition II

If something makes $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ true, then $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ makes $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ true.

That Jago is committed to this supposition, and analogous suppositions, is implicit in (Liggins 2019). Given that Jago believes in states of affairs (2018, §§2.5–2.6), how could he not be committed to $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ making $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ true?

Supposition III

If $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ makes $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ true, then $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is true because $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists.

Jago commits himself to this supposition in the passage quoted above. Additionally, Jago's theory entails that if a state of affairs makes a proposition true, that proposition is true in part because that state of affairs exists and in part because that state of affairs is a member of it (2018, 75–76, 250, 253).

Supposition IV

If $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists, then $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.

Again, this supposition is implicit in (Liggins 2019). As is:

Supposition V

If $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists and $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists because $\langle P \rangle$ is true, then $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.

It seems to be necessary for Jago to accept both of these suppositions, if he is to explain why if $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true, then $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.

Here is the argument:

- i. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true. [Assumption]
- ii. Something makes $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ true. [i & Supposition I]
- iii. $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ makes $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ true. [ii & Supposition II]
- iv. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists. [iii & Supposition III]
- v. $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists. [iv]
- vi. $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ exists because $\langle P \rangle$ is true. [v & Supposition IV]
- vii. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true. [iv, vi, & Supposition V]

If $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true, then $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true. [i–vii]

Hence Jago's theory and $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ entail Premise 2:

- 2. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is true because $\langle P \rangle$ is true.

2.3 Premise 3

If Jago is committed to the truth of Premise 1 and he is committed to the truth of Premise 2, then he is committed to the truth of Premise 3. I will show this by showing that Jago is committed to the soundness of the following argument:

- a. Premise 2 differs in truth-value from Premise 3 only if the explanandum of Premise 2 differs from the explanandum of Premise 3. [Assumption]

- b. The explanandum of Premise 2 differs from the explanandum of Premise 3 only if $|\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle \text{ is true}|$ differs from $|\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$ or $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle \text{ is true}$ differs from $\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}$. [Assumption]
- c. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle = \langle P \rangle$. [Premise 1]
- d. $|\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle \text{ is true}| = |\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}|$. [c & Jago's theory]
- e. $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle \text{ is true} = \langle P \rangle \text{ is true}$. [c & Jago's theory]
- f. The explanandum of Premise 2 is identical to the explanandum of Premise 3. [b, d, & e]

Premise 2 does not differ in truth-value from Premise 3. [a & f]

(I benefitted from (Künne 2018, 51–55) in trying to spell out this argument.)

As far as I can tell, every account of states of affairs Jago considers (2018, ch.4) is such that were he to accept it, he would be committed to Premise d following from Premise c (see also (Jago 2022, 238–39)).

The question to ask then is whether Premise e really does follow from Premise c and Jago's theory. The answer is it does. Jago thinks that what is said/stated by someone on a given occasion is a proposition (2018, 236, 238); with that said, consider:

In saying that David Jones changed the world, I thereby say that David Bowie did, 'Bowie' being the name Jones adopted. (Jago 2017, 294)

[W]e can contrast what is said with the particular *way* in which it is said. To bring out the idea, suppose Anna and Bob are arguing, Anna insisting that the planet now visible is Hesperus, whereas Bob insists that it is Phosphorus. There is clearly a sense in which they are not really disagreeing at all, for they are both correctly identifying the planet they see. Someone in the know may interject, 'stop arguing, you are saying the same thing!' Nevertheless, both parties are genuinely informed when they come to learn that the planet is correctly called both 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus'. What they lacked was *a posteriori* knowledge, not linguistic competence. This shows that the notion of *what is said* in an utterance does not align with the meaning of the

utterance, or with the speaker's beliefs, or with common knowledge in the conversation. (Jago 2017, 303)

See also (Jago 2018, 236–237, 266–267).

Jago does deny that propositions are 'objects' of belief, but it is clear what he thinks about their identity conditions:

One application for which the truthmaker approach [to propositions] is (probably) *not* suitable is the analysis of attitude reports. A truthmaker, as commonly understood, is a worldly entity such as a state of affairs. Truthmakers do not, in general, involve modes of presentation. What makes it true that George Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* also makes it true that Mary Anne Evans wrote *Middlemarch*, for they were one and the same person. So (assuming the necessity of identity), the proposition that George Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* will be identical to the proposition that Mary Anne Evans wrote *Middlemarch*, according to the truthmaker approach. Yet one can believe that George Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* without believing that Mary Anne Evans wrote *Middlemarch*. It seems that attitude reports are beyond the scope of the truthmaker approach. (Jago 2022, 238–39)

See also (Jago 2018, 236–238). So it is clear that Jago is committed to Premise e following from Premise c.³

Couldn't Jago argue that Premise b is false? Couldn't Jago argue that explananda, like beliefs, are to be individuated more finely than both states of affairs and propositions? He could, perhaps, but in that case, would the putatively metaphysical fact that $\langle P \rangle$ is true because P really be a fact about $\langle P \rangle$ as opposed to our conception of it? I assume here that Premise b is true.

³ Of course, given that Jago committed himself to $\langle\langle A \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ being identical to $\langle A \rangle$ (§2.1), he committed himself to $\langle\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ being identical to $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$. But I wanted to show that even if Jago hadn't committed himself to $\langle\langle A \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ being identical to $\langle A \rangle$, and had merely committed himself to $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ being identical to $\langle P \rangle$, his theory of propositions would have ensured his commitment to the identity of $\langle\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$.

Jago is committed to Premise 2 not differing in truth-value from Premise 3. Hence Jago is committed to Premise 3 being true if he is committed to Premise 2 being true. As we have already seen, he is committed to Premise 2 being true. So, Jago is committed to the truth of Premise 3.

2.4 Premise 4

While there is at least one truth whose truth is explained, at least in part, by its being true, namely ⟨at least one proposition is true⟩,⁴ there is surely at least one truth whose truth is not explained, not even in part, by its being true. I assume that ⟨P⟩ is such a truth. Jago can deny this of course, but there must be an analogous argument the fourth premise of which Jago couldn't reject. So let us pretend that Jago is committed to the truth of Premise 4.

3. Rejecting Premise 1

Jago is committed to the truth of Premise 3 (because he is committed to the truth of Premise 1 and Premise 2) and he is committed to the truth of Premise 4. Premise 3 and Premise 4 are contradictory, so which premises should Jago not be committed to? Jago shouldn't be committed to the truth of Premise 3 and should never have committed himself to the truth of Premise 1. Let us look again at the quote from §2.1:

Given our analysis of *being true*, ⟨⟨A⟩ is true⟩ is identical to the existential proposition ⟨ $\exists x x$ truthmakes ⟨A⟩⟩, which we identify with the set of all its witnesses: all truthmakers for ⟨A⟩. So ⟨⟨A⟩ is true⟩ is identical to ⟨A⟩ itself. (Jago 2018, 251–252)

Jago made a mistake. To make it clear what the mistake is, let us look at an argument Jago could have offered for Premise 1 which is based on what

⁴ ⟨at least one proposition is true⟩ is true because at least one proposition is true. At least one proposition is true at least in part because ⟨at least one proposition is true⟩ is true. I think it follows that ⟨at least one proposition is true⟩ is true at least in part because ⟨at least one proposition is true⟩ is true. See (Krämer 2020) for further discussion.

he says in that passage. Assuming that $|P|$ is the sole truthmaker for $\langle P \rangle$,⁵ the argument is as follows:

$\alpha.$ $\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is identical to $\langle\text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}\rangle$.

Jago is committed to Premise α because he wrote: “ $\langle\langle A \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is identical to the existential proposition $\langle\exists x x \text{ truthmakes } \langle A \rangle\rangle$ ” (2018, 251).

$\beta.$ $\langle\text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}\rangle$ is identical to $\{|P|\}$.

He is committed to Premise β because he wrote: “we identify [the existential proposition $\langle\exists x x \text{ truthmakes } \langle A \rangle\rangle$] with the set of all its witnesses: all truthmakers for $\langle A \rangle$ ” (2018, 251).

$\gamma.$ $\langle P \rangle$ is identical to $\{|P|\}$.

He is committed to Premise γ because he wrote: “propositions are sets of entities...and we think of those entities as truthmakers for that proposition” (2018, 250). See also (Jago 2022, 231).

$\delta.$ $\langle\text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}\rangle$ is identical to $\langle P \rangle$.

Premise δ follows from Premise β & Premise γ .

$\langle\langle P \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is identical to $\langle P \rangle$.

The conclusion, Premise 1, follows from Premise α & Premise δ .

The argument is valid. Of the three rejectable premises—Premise α , Premise β , and Premise γ —Jago can only reject Premise β : Premise α and Premise γ are entailed by his core commitments concerning truth and propositions (§1).

Jago should not have been committed to Premise β . Jago writes as an introduction to his truthmaker account of propositions:

The *truthmaker account of propositions* identifies a proposition with the set of its possible truthmakers. That is, a proposition $\langle A \rangle$ is a set of possible entities, each of which makes it true that

⁵ This assumption is consonant with what Jago has said in print (2022, 231), but a different assumption regarding the truthmaker(s) for $\langle P \rangle$ could be made, if necessary, in the course of giving an analogous argument which would be harder to assess.

A (or would do, were it to exist). The proposition *that I am sitting* is the singleton containing the state of affairs *that I am sitting*. The proposition *that someone is sitting* is the set containing all possible states of affairs of the form *that x is sitting*. (Jago 2022, 231)

Based on what Jago says there, he is committed to $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$ having $|\text{P}| \text{ makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}|$ as a member. Assuming that $|\text{P}| \text{ makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}|$ is not identical to $|\text{P}|$, $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$ is not identical to $\{|\text{P}|\}$. Hence Premise β is false. Jago should welcome this: if he rejects Premise β , as it seems he must do, he is free to reject Premise 1, as he must do.

Jago's mistake was committing himself to the identity of $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$ with the set of its *witness* states. Even if every witness state of $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$, i.e. every truthmaker for $\langle P \rangle$, is a truthmaker for $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$, not every truthmaker for $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$ is a witness state of it, i.e. not every truthmaker for $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$ is a truthmaker for $\langle P \rangle$. There is an *instance* state of $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$, namely $|\text{P}| \text{ makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}|$, which is not a witness state of it, which makes $\langle \text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true} \rangle$ true, but which does not make $\langle P \rangle$ true.

Jago seems to have made a similar mistake (as I see it) in his discussion of alethic states of affairs. He wrote:

In general, existential states of affairs are grounded by their instances, and since $|\langle A \rangle \text{ is true}|$ is identified with $|\exists y(y \text{ truthmakes } \langle A \rangle)|$, it follows that its possible grounds are all and only the possible truthmakers for $\langle A \rangle$.⁶ (Jago 2018, 195)

But $|\text{P}| \text{ makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}|$ is not a truthmaker for $\langle P \rangle$, and yet it is a ground for $|\text{something makes } \langle P \rangle \text{ true}|$.⁷

⁶ Abbreviations have been made consistent with those in this paper.

⁷ Incidentally, this shows that Jago's truth-grounding principle, the principle he argues for in §6.3 of (Jago 2018), is false.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have identified an inconsistency in Jago's theory of truth (§2) and I have shown how to remove it without relinquishing Jago's core commitments (§3). The lesson is that Jago cannot serve two masters: he must choose Bolzano over Frege (Künne 2018).

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