

A THOMISTIC TRUTHMAKER PRINCIPLE

TIMOTHY PAWL*

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1. INTRODUCTION

IN this article I provide a Thomistic truthmaker principle.¹ Although Aquinas himself never provides a truthmaker principle, he does say things that show that he thought that many truths require truthmakers, or, in other terms, that truths have an ontological grounding. That truths are somehow grounded or explained by reality is an important aspect of Thomistic thought. The principle I provide could be affirmed by someone with Thomistic tendencies: it is consistent with Aquinas' thought and makes sense of some peculiar aspects of his writings. In what follows, I will argue that a Thomistic truthmaker principle should require all truths *about being* to have a truthmaker *at any time that they are about* (and I will explain what these two restrictions mean).

It may seem at first that a Thomistic truthmaker principle should be Armstrong's Truthmaker Maximalism – the claim that all true propositions require truthmakers.² Consider these claims from Aquinas:

«[T]ruth which is in the soul but caused by things does not depend on what one thinks but on the existence of things. For from the fact that a thing is or is not, a statement or an intellect is said to be true or false. [QDV., q. 1 a. 2 ad. 3],³

* University of St. Thomas, 2115 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55105, USA. E-mail: pawl8866@stthomas.edu

¹ For other work on medieval theories of truthmaking, see BRIAN EMBRY (2014; 2015), TIMOTHY PAWL (2008). This article draws heavily from PAWL (2008), section 3.1.

² For discussions of Truthmaker Maximalism, see: D. ARMSTRONG (2004, pp. 5-6), E. BARRIO and G. RODRIGUEZ-PEREYRA (2015), R. CAMERON (2005; 2008), M. JAGO (2012; 2013), T. MERRICKS (2009, pp. 24-27), T. PAWL (2012; 2014), G. RODRIGUEZ-PEREYRA (2006), N. SAENZ (2014), M. SIMPSON (2014), and A. SKILES (2014).

³ THOMAS AQUINAS (1952), *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, question 1, article 2, response to the third objection; (henceforth QDV., q. 1 a. 2 ad. 3). I have acquired all quotations from Aquinas, unless I say otherwise, from the Past Masters database, *The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*.

and:

«[J]udgment is said to be true when it conforms to the external reality. [QDV., q. 1 a. 3 resp.]»,

and finally:

«[Y]ou are not white because we think truly that you are white; but conversely we think you are white because you are white. Hence it has been shown that the way in which a thing is disposed is the cause of truth both in thought and in speech». ⁴

Given these passages, Aquinas would seem to require truthmakers for all truths. There are many more passages where Aquinas affirms a truthmaker principle, but not necessarily Truthmaker Maximalism. For instance, to provide three more examples, Aquinas says:

«That something is or is not does not result from a change in the course of things to correspond to our affirmation or denial, for the truth of our enunciation is not the cause of the existence of things, but rather the converse», ⁵

and:

«True or false is said to be in the enunciation as in a sign of true or false thought; but true or false is in the mind as in a subject (as is said in VI *Metaphysicae*), and in the thing as in a cause (as is said in the book *Predicamentorum*)-for it is from the facts of the case, i.e., from a thing's being so or not being so, that speech is true or false [*De Int.*, b.1 l.7 para. 3]»,

and:

«[T]hought is said to be true insofar as it is conformed to the thing, but false insofar as it is not in conformity with the thing [*De Int.*, b. 1 l. 3 para. 7]».

It seems that if there were a proposition which lacked some corresponding being, that proposition would lack truth as well. Thus it seems that Aquinas is a Truthmaker Maximalist.

Elsewhere, however, as I will show in the following section, he claims that not every true proposition requires some existing thing to make it true. ⁶ In the coming sections I discuss ways in which Aquinas narrows the scope of a Thomistic truthmaker principle. As I see it, Aquinas provides two restrictions on the range of a truthmaker principle: neither truths about the past and future nor truths about non-being require truthmakers. I will discuss each of these restrictions in turn.

⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, (1995) *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* (henceforth, *In Meta.*, b. 9 l.11 para. 1897).

⁵ IDEM (1962) *Aristotle on Interpretation*, book 1, lecture 14, paragraph 4 (henceforth *De Int.*, b.1 l.14 para. 4).

⁶ See, for instance, QDV q.1 a.5 resp, which I quote in the next section of this article.

2. THE FIRST RESTRICTION: TRUTHS ABOUT THE PAST AND FUTURE

One traditional difficulty for Truthmaker Maximalists is supplying truthmakers for truths about the past. For instance, *that Troy fell* is true, but what is it that exists and relevantly necessitates the truth of *that Troy fell*? This difficulty is easily solved if one posits *eternalism*, the view that there are past and future times and they are as equally existent as the present time.⁷ If the past, present and future are equally real, then the truthmaker for *that Troy fell* could be whatever made *that Troy is falling* true at the time of Troy's falling, whether that be a state of affairs, a thing under a qua clause or something else.⁸ That very thing exists (though it may not exist *now*) to do the work of truthmaking.

If one is a *presentist* – an individual who denies eternalism, claiming that the only things that exist are the things that presently exist – one has a much harder time. What is it that exists *now* that both necessitates and is relevant to the truth *that Troy fell*? If truths about non-present times require truthmakers, and there is no present truthmaker for the proposition *that Troy fell* – and so no truthmaker at all, given presentism – then the presentist is in hot water.

In the last sentence of the previous paragraph I wrote 'if truths about non-present times require truthmakers.' If the correct truthmaker principle doesn't range over truths about non-present times, the presentist may have a way out of the difficulties. I will argue that Aquinas's truthmaker principle ranges over only the present.⁹

⁷ One should note that eternalism is not the only view of time that would provide the required truthmaker for *that Troy fell*. For instance, a growing block view of time would also provide the needed truthmaker. For more on eternalism, see M. REA (2003). This thesis by the name of 'eternalism' should be kept conceptually distinct from two other well-known positions with similar names. One is the eternalism that denies that God exists in time (STUMP and KRETZMANN 1981); the other is the thesis that propositions have their truth-values changelessly (RICHARD 1981).

⁸ For a defender of states of affairs as truthmakers, see ARMSTRONG (1997, chap. 8); for a defender of things under qua clauses as truthmakers, see D. LEWIS (2003, 25). For a detailed discussion of each, see PAWL (2008, Chapter 2, sections 2.1 and 2.3, respectively).

⁹ One may wonder here about divine knowledge. And, indeed, in the following I discuss an example that surely is an instance of divine knowledge. In this article I am focusing on the truthmakers for propositions. God doesn't know, though, by making propositions or being related to propositions, at least for Aquinas. Rather, God knows by his simple act of being. A theory of divine knowledge is complex and beyond the scope of this article. My goal here is to get clear on the truthmakers for propositions, the things that humans know by forming (via intellectual acts, on a common medieval view) or being acquainted with (on a common contemporary view). So, while there are interesting questions about how God knows the truth of a prophecy about the future when he gives it at a prior time, I must set such questions aside in this article. My thanks to Eleonore Stump for raising this

Aquinas writes concerning truthmakers for future truths in the following passage:

«In this commensuration or conformity of intellect and thing it is not necessary that each of the two actually exist. Our intellect can be in conformity with things that, although not existing now, will exist in the future. Otherwise, it would not be true to say that “the Antichrist will be born.»¹⁰

By ‘actually exist,’ Aquinas means that the two need not exist at the same time, and not, as someone immersed in the contemporary modal debates may think, that the two need not exist in the same possible world. The important point here, as I see it, is that Aquinas claims that some propositions are true and yet have no truthmaker existing at the time at which they are true.¹¹ One should note, though, that Aquinas says our thoughts can be conformed with things that do not exist now but will exist in the future, since *otherwise* our thoughts about those things would not be true.¹² That ‘otherwise’ will be relevant later when I argue that, while truths about the past and future do not require truthmakers for Aquinas, truths about a time require truthmakers at that time.¹³

interesting question. For an insightful discussion of prophecy and God’s knowledge, see STUMP and KRETZMANN (1991).

¹⁰ QDV., q. 1 a. 5 *resp.* Aquinas doesn’t think that *all* propositions about the future have truth-values. Rather, the only propositions about the future that are true are those the causes of which are existing at the time of the utterance and whose causes necessitate them. That is to say, the only true propositions about the future, for Aquinas, are those that, given the state of the world at the time they are believed, can’t be otherwise. See *De Int.*, b. 1 l. 13 and *De Int.*, b. 1 l. 15 para. 4 for more on this.

¹¹ It is true that, as far as the text goes, Aquinas could think that such propositions about the future do have existing truthmakers, but the things they are about are not them. For instance, perhaps Aquinas could think that the Antichrist is what this proposition is about, but that now, before the birth of the antichrist, there is something else making it true.

¹² For an intellect to be in conformity with a thing is for that intellect to possess the same form as that thing. See, for instance, Aquinas’s commentary on the *Sentences*, *I Sent.*, 48.1.1 arg. 3. However, what it means for an intellect to possess the very same form as a thing is a vexing question. B. LEFTOW (2003) argues that on Aquinas’s view of properties there is no form which is literally “in” or “had by” both the intellect and the known thing. See also J. BROWER and S. BROWER-TOLAND (2008). I thank Gloria Frost for her help and for the reference to Aquinas’s *Sentences* commentary.

¹³ This strong claim – that truths about a time require truthmakers at that time – must be reined in by the Second Restriction on the range of the Thomistic truthmaker principle, which I discuss in a coming section. This is a strong claim, which, while I don’t argue that Aquinas held, I do think is consistent with his metaphysics. The shrewd reader will see that this claim has repercussions for some truths which don’t appear to be about any particular time. For instance, universal claims, such as, *that all whales are mammals*. I discuss such universal claims in PAWL (2008), section 3.3.C, where I argue that they do not require truthmakers on a Thomistic view.

Aquinas's example of the Antichrist is a theological example, but nothing hangs on its theological content. He employed a theological example, I think, simply because it is a truth about the future that none of his interlocutors would have denied. It could have easily been a different proposition about something that doesn't exist in the present but either did exist in the past or will exist in the future. Indeed, Aquinas goes on to say in the same article that the same reasoning that holds for truths about the future holds for truths about the past.¹⁴

The implications that the above quotation about the Antichrist have concerning Aquinas's truthmaker principle will depend on his theory of time. If he is a presentist, then he will think that there are truths for which there exist no truthmakers – namely, truths about the past and future. If he is an eternalist, however, then he can still say that a truthmaker exists for the truth *that the antichrist will be born*, it just doesn't exist now. So if Aquinas were an eternalist, he wouldn't need to rein in the range of his truthmaker principle to apply only to truths about the present.

3. THEORIES OF TIME AND THE FIRST RESTRICTION

What, exactly, Aquinas's theory of time was is a vexing question.¹⁵ I do not intend to give a final analysis of his theory of time here. Rather, I will motivate the view that Aquinas was not an eternalist.

On the one hand, Aquinas, when writing about the relation between propositions about non-present things and reality, says:

«Since the future as such is not, and the past as such is not, the same reasoning holds for the truth of the past and future as for the truth of non-being».¹⁶

It looks as if Aquinas is claiming that the past and future do not exist. Truths about the past and future are dealt with in the same way we deal with truths about non-being (which, as we will see when I discuss the Second Restriction to the Thomistic truthmaker principle, do not require truthmakers).

Furthermore, Aquinas writes:

«A contingent [being] does not exercise an act of existence as long as it is a future [being; but] as soon as it is present it has both existence and truth».¹⁷

The point here, I take it, is that non-present things – in particular, things that will exist but do not exist at the present – are things that do not exist, period. So it looks as if Aquinas is not an eternalist.

¹⁴ See *QDV.*, q. 1 a. 5 ad. 7.

¹⁵ See, for instance, W. LANE CRAIG (1990), G. FROST (2010), B. LEFTOW (1990), and B. SHANLEY (1997).

¹⁶ *QDV.*, q. 1 a. 5 ad 7.

¹⁷ *QDV.*, q. 2 a. 12 ad 9.

On the other hand, however, Aquinas elsewhere appears to be an eternalist of some sort. He considers an argument in which the opponent claims that:

«[T]he same reality is the cause of the truth of these three propositions: ‘Socrates is sitting’, ‘Socrates will be sitting’, and ‘Socrates was sitting.’»¹⁸

This claim from Aquinas’s opponent doesn’t tell us whether Aquinas was an eternalist. Aquinas’s reply, however, makes him look like an eternalist.

Aquinas writes:

«Socrates’s sitting, [the thing] which is the cause of the truth of the proposition ‘Socrates is sitting’, does not have the same status while Socrates is sitting and after he will have sat and before he sits. Hence, the truth caused by Socrates’s sitting likewise exists in different ways and is signified in different ways by the present-tense proposition, the past-tense proposition, and the future-tense proposition».¹⁹

Here it appears that Socrates’s sitting has a different status while he sits as opposed to before or after he sits. Now it may be the case that the different status is just that it exists while Socrates is sitting and it has the status of not-existing before or after he sits. That could be what Aquinas means. That would be an odd way to say it, though. Rather, it seems that Aquinas might be saying that Socrates’s sitting exists, but exists in a different way (with a different status) before or after he sits. Now, if this is what Aquinas means, then this passage makes Aquinas look like an eternalist.²⁰

If Aquinas were an eternalist, his claim about the antichrist should be understood as his saying that the truth *that the antichrist will come* requires a truthmaker, but it doesn’t require a presently existing truthmaker. If Aquinas were a presentist, his claim about the antichrist should be understood as his saying that the truth *that the antichrist will come* doesn’t require a truthmaker, and hence doesn’t require a presently existing truthmaker.

¹⁸ ST., 1 q. 16 a. 8 ob. 4. This is an unpublished translation of Alfred Freddoso, used with permission, available at: <http://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/Part%201/st1-ques16.pdf>. All quotations from the Summa theologiae are from this source unless otherwise noted.

¹⁹ ST., 1 q. 16 a. 8 ad 4.

²⁰ It, of course, doesn’t entail that Aquinas was an eternalist. There is logical space for other views. For instance, even if Aquinas does really think that the past object, Socrates’s sitting, still exists, this passage doesn’t entail that Aquinas must think that it existed at all times before Socrates sat, or at all times after he sat. Another reason some think that Aquinas was an eternalist is because of his theology. Aquinas thought that God knows all moments of time, and that they are all immediately present to him. But that would seem to entail that all times exist, since one can’t know something immediately and presently unless it exists. So all times must exist. Thus eternalism is true. This is an argument K. STALEY (2006) considers; he attributes it to K. ROGERS (2007). SHANLEY (1997) argues that God’s knowledge of all times does not entail the existence of all times. My thanks to Matthews Grant for calling my attention to this argument.

In what follows I will write as if Aquinas is not an eternalist. I take that to be the best reading of the texts I have cited. If it should turn out that Aquinas is an eternalist, this restriction to the Thomistic truthmaker principle could be removed. In that case, adherents to a Thomistic metaphysics would be able to provide truthmakers for past and future truths. But, if I am right and Aquinas was not an eternalist, then we have learned something about a Thomistic truthmaker principle: it ranges only over truths about the present.

4. OBJECTIONS TO AND WORRIES ABOUT THE FIRST RESTRICTION

I claim that a Thomistic truthmaker principle should be restricted to propositions about the present. If a proposition is about the past or future but true now, it doesn't require a truthmaker.²¹ Thus this Thomistic truthmaker principle is more restrictive than Truthmaker Maximalism.

So, for instance, while the proposition *that Troy fell* does not require a truthmaker (since it is about the past) its present-tensed correlate – *Troy is falling* – will have had a truthmaker at the time which it is about. Suppose a simplistic tensed logic for a moment, where one forms propositions about the past and the future by modifying present-tensed propositions with temporal operators. For instance, if p is the proposition *that Troy is falling*, $Was(p)$ is the proposition *that it was the case that Troy is falling* and $Will-be(p)$ is the proposition *that it will be the case that Troy is falling*. If p in this schema is about the present, then p is a present-tense counterpart of the past- or future-tense proposition. To be about the present, the proposition must itself include no imbedded temporal operators or the semantic equivalent thereof. For instance, a proposition of the form $Was(Was(q))$ has as its substitution instance of p a formula that contains a temporal operator, and so $Was(q)$ does not count as a present-tense counterpart of $Was(Was(q))$. Likewise, if p semantically included the equivalent of a temporal operator, it would not be a present-tense counterpart of $Was(p)$.

Given this simplistic tense logic, the Thomist proponent of the First Restriction can say the following: for any true proposition of the form $Was(p)$ or $Will-be(p)$, where p contains no temporal operators or semantic equivalents to temporal operators, there must be a truthmaker for p when p is true. This claim will need to be restrained further by the addition of the Second Restriction in the following sections.

One may wonder about the truthmaker requirements for truths about multiple times, or truths that are about the present but also about the past. For

²¹ The eternalist can also affirm this. Where the eternalist and the presentist part ways is that the presentist who affirms this proposition must deny Maximalism, whereas the eternalist needn't (though could, if so inclined). The restriction on the truthmaker principle, then, is in part due to the Thomistic view that eternalism is false.

instance, consider this proposition: *that the world has a history*.²² It is a truth about the world, now, but it requires that there existed things before now as well. Think of it this way – here is a truth about the present state of the world: there was another before it. But since it is a truth that says now that the world was a certain way, this truth includes an imbedded temporal modifier. As such, it violates the requirement that p contains no temporal operators or semantic equivalents to temporal operators. Consider this passage from Aquinas:

«To be sure, the assertion ‘This truth did not exist at that time’ is now true. But this is true only by a truth that now exists in our intellect, and not by any truth that now exists on the part of a thing. For it is a truth about a non-being. But a non-being does not have its truth of itself; rather, its being true comes solely from an intellect’s apprehending it [*ST.*, 1 q. 16 a. 7 ad 4]».

This is a truth about the past, namely, that a certain proposition didn’t exist at that time (Aquinas thinks propositions are accidents of the mind). But there is no currently existing thing that makes it true, at least according to Aquinas.

Another sort of proposition that might cause concern is a proposition whose relata do not contemporaneously exist. For instance, the proposition *that Francis is taller than Socrates was*.²³ This is not a proposition about a particular time, since there is no time at which Francis and Socrates exist. But that doesn’t mean it doesn’t depend on how reality is or was. The truthmaker for *that Francis is n inches tall*, where n is a name for a number, exists now. When Socrates existed, there was a truthmaker for the truth *that Socrates is m inches tall*. There is some necessary relation that holds between m and n such that n is greater than m .²⁴ So, given these three truths – the two concerning the height of individual men, both of which had or have truthmakers at the times which they are about, and the necessary truth about the numbers – the truth *that Francis is taller than Socrates was* is entailed. The truth depends on the world, but it doesn’t depend on the world by having a presently existing thing which it is about and which necessitates the truth *that Francis is taller than Socrates was*.

Consider this final example of a difficult proposition for this truthmaker theory: *that there will never be a house built on this spot*.²⁵ This is not a truth about a particular time, though it might still be true. Thus, for this truthmaker theory, this truth has no truthmaker. Another way to say the same thing is *that there is no future time at which a house is built on this spot*. As such, this prop-

²² My thanks to René van Woudenberg for this example.

²³ I thank Joseph Salerno for this helpful example.

²⁴ I discuss truthmakers for necessary truths in Chapter 4 of PAWL (2008), section 4.4.B.

²⁵ Again, I thank Joseph Salerno for this helpful example.

osition is an example of a negative existential.²⁶ In the next section I discuss such truths under the label “truths about non-being.”

Another worry that one may have is that the first Thomistic restriction, the restriction that only truths about the present require truthmakers, goes against the main intuition behind truthmaker theory: that truth has a substantial grounding in reality. If we adopt this restriction, the objector claims, many truths lose their grounding in reality. And if these truths, why not other truths? If we renounce the grounding of truths that aren’t about the present, doesn’t this lead to a slippery slope, some truthmaker theorists may wonder.

I don’t think that this restriction really has the Thomist renouncing the thesis that truth depends on being. The Thomist can still provide a universally quantified thesis about the relation between truth and being, a thesis which seems to capture all that the Thomist wants concerning time, truth, and being. Consider this thesis:

(1): For any truth about being which includes no temporal modifiers, whether semantic or syntactic, p , there must exist some object, T , which makes p true.

This isn’t the full Thomistic truthmaker principle, since it leaves out the Second Restriction. This principle must be modified in light of that restriction. But, so far, this is where the Thomistic truthmaker principle stands.

(1) requires that, for any truth, it either has, had, or will have a foundation in reality. The foundation for the truth *that it was the case that Troy is falling* is the actual, historical fall of Troy. That thing which was – but isn’t – is the grounding for truths about the fall of Troy. All truth is grounded in how reality is, was, or will be, but not every true proposition needs a truthmaker.

Gloria Frost (2010, 198-201) discusses Aquinas’s view of the grounding of past-tense truths. She comes to the same conclusion I come to in this section, at least with respect to past-tense propositions. Where p is a present-tense truth (e.g., *Troy is falling*) and Pp is that truth modified by a past-tense operator (e.g., *it was the case that Troy is falling*), she concludes (Frost 2010, 201):

«The texts examined show that Aquinas is committed to the principle that the ontological grounds of any past-tense proposition Pp is the ontological grounds of its present-tense counterpart p . That which causes p ’s truth need not exist while Pp is true. All that is required for Pp ’s truth is that something did exist that caused the truth of p in the past».

With my (1) in mind, and bolstered by the work of Frost, I turn now to the Second Restriction.

To summarize, the First Restriction on the range of the Thomistic truthmaker principle is that propositions about the past and future do not require

²⁶ I discuss negative existentials in section 3.3.B of PAWL (2008).

truthmakers to be true. Rather, only propositions lacking temporal modification require truthmakers. *That Troy is falling*, if true, requires a truthmaker. *That it was the case that Troy is falling* does not require a truthmaker, but its non-temporally-modified-base-proposition, what I've called, following Frost, its present-tense counterpart, must have had a truthmaker when it was true. The Second Restriction, to which I now turn, is that truths about non-being do not require truthmakers.

5. THE SECOND RESTRICTION: TRUTHS ABOUT NON-BEING

The second way in which the Thomistic truthmaker principle restricts the range of Truthmaker Maximalism is by *not* requiring truthmakers for truths about non-being. The following paragraphs will serve to clarify what it means for a proposition to be about non-being.

Remember that in the discussion of the previous restriction I quoted Aquinas as saying:

«Since the future as such is not, and the past as such is not, the same reasoning holds for the truth of the past and future as for the truth of non-being».²⁷

We have seen that the reasoning about the past and the future referred to here is that truths about the past and future don't require truthmakers. It seems, then, that truths about non-being won't require truthmakers either. This thesis, that truths about non-being do not require truthmakers, is the subject of this section.

What is it for a proposition to be "about non-being?" A proposition is about non-being if and only if, if the proposition is representative, at least one of the things that it is representative of does not exist. A proposition is about non-being when one of its constituents fails to refer. What it is for a proposition to represent something is a very hard thing to pin down.²⁸ In this way it is similar to the aboutness condition on truthmaker theory.²⁹ We have yet to give satisfactory, illuminating necessary and sufficient conditions for what it is for proposition *p* to be representative of *T* or to be about *T*, but we know it when we see it. We know, for instance, that the proposition *that Francis is the pope* represents something about Francis and his ecclesial position, and not, say, something about Britney Spears and the British Parliament.

²⁷ QDV., q. 1 a. 5 ad 7.

²⁸ See PETER VAN INWAGEN (1986), where he discusses how it could be that a proposition or set of propositions represents something about the world, in the end supporting the position that propositional representation is brute and unanalyzable. The same, as van Inwagen notes, is true of set inclusion for set theory. See also A. PLANTINGA (1979, pp. 134-5) and MERRICKS (2009, pp. 28-32).

²⁹ For my discussion of the aboutness criterion, see PAWL (2008) section 1.2.

The truth *that there are no dragons* is a truth about non-being, since what it is representative of – dragons – doesn't exist. The truth *that it is not the case that Socrates is standing* is a truth about non-being, since what it is representative of – a standing Socrates – doesn't exist. The falsehood *that there are dragons* is a falsehood about non-being, since what it is representative of – dragons – do not exist. The falsehood *that Francis is standing* (suppose he is sleeping) is a falsehood about non-being, since what it is representative of – Francis, along with whatever metaphysical story one tells for predications, for example, a standing accident – does not exist.

Might Aquinas have meant that for a proposition to be about being its subject alone must exist? In that case, the proposition *that Francis is standing*, when Francis is sleeping, is about being, since Francis exists, though his standing does not. I do not believe he meant this. Aquinas thought that the proposition is about whatever fills its subject role along with whatever fills its predicate role. Aquinas comments on Aristotle's understanding of a proposition being about being or non-being (in this translation, about what is or what is not):

«In saying what is and what is not, Aristotle is not referring only to the existence or nonexistence of a subject. What he is saying is that the reality signified by the predicate is in or is not in the reality signified by the subject. For what is signified in saying, "The raven is white", is that what is not, is, although the raven itself is an existing thing».³⁰

Here we see Aquinas claim that if the subject of a predicative proposition – a proposition of the form '*a* is *F*' – exists but the referent of the predicate is not "in" it, then the proposition is about non-being. So a proposition is about "non-being" just in case it's subject doesn't exist, or it's predicate is not true of the subject. I take this passage to support my understanding that Francis isn't the sole thing which the proposition *that Francis is standing* is about. Rather, that proposition is about Francis and about whatever ontologically fills the predicate role in the sentence. Since, in Aquinas's example, that second thing isn't, since the raven is not white, the proposition is about "what is not;" that is, it is about non-being.

I think that Aquinas means this distinction between propositions about being (*ens* – "what is") and propositions about non-being ("what is not") to capture the two different ways that a proposition can be true, as he defines truth. He says in more than one place, following Aristotle, that a proposition is true when it says of what is that it is, or says of what is not that it is not; and a proposition is false when it says of what is not that it is or of what is that it is not.³¹ It seems as if there are two ways propositions can be: they can say of something that it is, or they can say of something that it is not. Those proposi-

³⁰ *De Int.* b. 1 l. 9 para. 4.

³¹ See, for instance, *De Int.*, b. 1, l. 11, para. 7.

tions that say something is are positive, while those that say something is not are negative.

Before going on to discuss how propositions about being or non-being are related to positive and negative propositions, I quickly summarize these terms here. A proposition is *about being* when that which the proposition is representative of exists. A proposition is *about non-being* when at least one thing that the proposition is representative of does not exist. Thus whether a proposition is about being or not about being is determined by what exists or doesn't exist. A proposition is *positive* when it represents something (or things) as existing. A proposition is *negative* when it is not the case that it represents something (or things) as existing. Thus whether a proposition is positive or negative is determined by how the proposition represents what it represents, whether it represents it as existing or not. *That Pope Francis exists* is a true, positive proposition about being, since the proposition represents something as existing and that very thing which it is representative of does, in fact, exist. *That there are not dragons* is a true, negative proposition about non-being, since the proposition is not representative of something (or things) existing and that thing (or things) which it represents as not existing don't, in fact, exist. If one double negates a true, positive proposition, one doesn't acquire a true, negative proposition. The surface grammar of the proposition doesn't dictate whether the proposition is positive or negative.

Aquinas discusses the relation between non-being and negative truths in some passages. He writes: «if non-being is in conformity with any intellect, it is not because of itself but because of the intellect which forms within itself the notion of non-being». ³² It isn't that there are non-beings which the intellect conforms itself to when it thinks things like *that there are no dragons*. Rather, there is no truthmaker for such truths.

Or reconsider this passage:

«To be sure, the assertion 'This truth did not exist at that time' is now true. But this is true only by a truth that now exists in our intellect, and not by any truth that now exists on the part of a thing. For it is a truth about a non-being. But a non-being does not have its truth of itself; rather, its being true comes solely from an intellect's apprehending it». ³³

As he says, truths about non-being get their truth from an intellect's apprehension, and not by something that "now exists on the part of a thing". Or,

³² QDV., q. 1 a. 5 ad 2.

³³ ST., 1 q. 16 a. 7 ad 4. Here the final 'it' refers to the intellect's apprehension of the proposition. There needn't be a non-existent dragon that my intellect must apprehend for me to know *that there are no dragons*. Rather, my intellect apprehends the proposition *that there are no dragons*, and the truth conditions for that proposition are met (and those truth conditions do not include among them dragons, whether existent or non-existent).

to put the same point in a different way, truths that say of what is not that it is not are not true in virtue of some existing non-being which acts as a truthmaker.³⁴

So the Second Restriction on the Thomistic truthmaker principle is that truths about non-being – truths that say that something isn't or that something isn't a certain way – do not require truthmakers.

6. OBJECTIONS TO AND WORRIES ABOUT THE SECOND RESTRICTION

An objection to the previous restriction raises its head again here, and this time with bigger teeth. One objection to the First Restriction is that it seems to allow some truths to lack a substantial dependence on reality. But the intuition that truth depends on reality is the main motivation behind truthmaker theory.

I argued that this is only an appearance of a lack of substantial dependence, since (at least according to the First Restriction) every truth requires a truthmaker at the time that it is about. But now, given the Second Restriction, that is not true. There are some truths that do not require truthmakers, either now or ever.³⁵ And surely this is too much. One cannot be a truthmaker theorist and allow so many truths the privilege of *not* depending on reality at any time.

It might seem that this Second Restriction allows for ad hoc exceptions to the rule that all truth depends on how reality is. I don't think it does. The Second Restriction still requires reality to be a certain way for negative truths to be true. Consider the stock example *that there are no dragons* again; this proposition is true, and reality has to be a certain way for it to be true: there can't be any dragons. There isn't an existing truthmaker for this truth—some existing thing which, by its mere existence, necessitates the truth of the proposition *that there are no dragons* and which the proposition *that there are no dragons* is about. Rather, this truth is true *in virtue of* its complement – *that there are dragons* – lacking a truthmaker. More generally, negative propositions are true, when true, because their positive complements lack truthmakers. In this way, negative propositions have their truth-values derivatively, but still based on how reality is; they don't, as David Lewis (1992, 218) said, «float in the void». They lack truthmakers, but they don't lack a robust connection to how the world is.

For Aquinas, it isn't the case that every truth needs a truthmaker; rather, for Aquinas, for any proposition or its complement about the present, one or the other of the two, were it to be true, would require a truthmaker. This is not to

³⁴ To see an excellent treatment of Aquinas on truthmakers for truths about non-being, see G. WASSERMAN (2006).

³⁵ Consider these negative truths: *that there are no dragons*; *that there are not exactly two dragons*; *that there are not exactly three dragons*...

claim that whichever is true requires a truthmaker. Rather, for any two propositions about the present, p and $\sim p$, one or the other of the two would require a truthmaker to be true. Positive truths about the present have truthmakers that make them true; negative truths about the present are true in virtue of their positive complements' lacking truthmakers.

Another worry that one may have is that the distinction between propositions about being and propositions about non-being is less than clear. But I do not think that is true. A proposition about being is a proposition such that each thing it is about exists; whereas a proposition about non-being is such that it is not the case that each thing it is about exists. While in many cases it might not be clear whether the things in question actually exist – that is, we may not be in an epistemic state such that we can tell whether there are such things – that doesn't make it any harder to understand the difference between propositions about being and propositions about non-being. We might not know whether there is a dragon now, but that doesn't make it any harder for us to understand that this proposition – *that there is a dragon* – is a proposition about being if and only if there is a dragon.

Doesn't this distinction assume that the truth *that there are no dragons* isn't about something that exists, and isn't that a problem? Wouldn't the Maximalist deny that claim? It is true that the Maximalist would deny that claim, but I don't think that is important here. If I were using this as an argument against a Maximalist, or in an attempt to disprove Maximalism, then that would be a problem. But I am not bound in setting out Aquinas's position and defending it from objections to use only those propositions which his opponents would accept. If the Maximalist wants to object to this Thomistic response, the burden of proof is on the Maximalist to show that *that there are no dragons* is, in fact, about some existing thing.

Even if there is a clear distinction between truths about being and truths about non-being, is there really a good motivation for affirming this Second Restriction? Why is it acceptable for negative truths to lack truthmakers but positive truths not to lack truthmakers? What makes such a distinction licit? Here are some reasons. It saves us from some difficulties; e.g., finding truthmakers for negative truths. It is traditional, insofar as Aquinas and Aristotle affirm it. It isn't obvious that we need truthmakers for claims about what is not, as we do for claims about what is. In general, we can have everything we want in a truthmaker theory by cutting out many of the purported truthmakers.

One may also wonder about whether some true propositions about non-being could have truthmakers. If some truths about non-being require truthmakers, what is the principle that divides those that have truthmakers from those that do not? Consider, for instance, the truth *that it is not the case that Francis is standing*. It appears to be a proposition about non-being, since it begins with a negation. Notice, though, that the things it is about (Francis and

Francis's bodily position) do exist. So the truth is about being. Consider, now, the truth *that it is not the case that Socrates is standing*. That truth has the same form as the previous truth about Francis but it is not about being, for Socrates doesn't exist.³⁶ The difference between the two isn't logical form. They have the same logical form. The difference is whether or not the thing (or things) each is about exists.

This is illustrative of a confusion we should avoid: we shouldn't think of this Second Restriction on the Thomistic truthmaker principle as a restriction that distinguishes between truths that begin with an odd number of tildes and truths that don't. We should think of it as a distinction between truths whose subject matter exists and truths whose subject matter does not exist. The existence or non-existence of what the proposition is about is the relevant and principled divider in this case.

7. WHAT, THEN, TO MAKE OF THE PASSAGES THAT SEEM TO SUPPORT MAXIMALISM?

If what I have said in the previous sections is correct, and a Thomistic truthmaker theory has the restrictions I have outlined above, what should we make of the passages from Aquinas that I cited earlier, and others, which seem to espouse Truthmaker Maximalism. Consider the first quotation given in support of the claim that Aquinas looks to be a Truthmaker Maximalist. The relevant sentence is «For from the fact that a thing is or is not, a statement or an intellect is said to be true or false».³⁷ One might read the first disjunct of the first disjunction as paired with the first disjunct of the second disjunction. On such a reading, a thing's being is paired with truth, and a thing's non-being is paired with falsity. On such a reading, it is easy to see the motivation for Maximalism. But one might also read this passage without pairing the disjuncts in the analysis. Instead the passage might mean that a thing's being can make a proposition true or false, and likewise a proposition can be true or false based on the non-existence of something. On such a reading, the motivation for Maximalism disappears. Moreover, this reading of the passage comports well with the distinctions between positive and negative propositions, and propositions about being or about non-being.

Consider the second passage: «judgment is said to be true when it conforms to the external reality».³⁸ Here if we understand conformity (or adequation) to be a two-place relation between the proposition and some bit or portion of

³⁶ And, I should think, neither does Socrates's sitting.

³⁷ *Quoniam eo quod res est vel non est, dicitur oratio vera vel falsa similiter et intellectus*. The Latin text here and the following Latin texts are from the *Corpus Thomisticum*: <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/>.

³⁸ *Sed quando adaequatur ei quod est extra in re, dicitur iudicium verum*.

reality, and we see that conformity relation as necessary for truth, then, again, the motivation for Maximalism is clear. For whatever that bit or portion of reality is that is the second relatum of the relation, that is an excellent candidate for being a truthmaker, and the having of such a truthmaker is a necessary condition for truth. We might, though, understand the conformity differently. Suppose we say that a judgment is conformed with reality if and only if it says of what is that it is, or says of what is not that it is not. Then conformity is a one-place predicate, and we needn't posit the existence of a truthmaker or a second relatum to make sense of truths about non-being.

Consider the third and final quotation I gave at the beginning of this paper as motivation for thinking that Aquinas is a Truthmaker Maximalist. The relevant bit of that quotation was: «the way in which a thing is disposed is the cause of truth both in thought and in speech».³⁹ Here one might think that a necessary condition for the truth of a proposition is a thing's being disposed a certain way. But then the existence of a thing is required for any truth and the cause of that truth. This, too, sounds like strong motivation for Maximalism. There is another way to understand this passage, though. One can read the disposition of a thing such that it doesn't require the existence of the thing. In this way, the disposition of a thing is similar to a reading of the "status" of a thing that I gave earlier concerning a different quotation. There is a status or disposition that dragons have, in a sense: they do not exist. And given that disposition, *that there are no dragons* is true. Or Pope Francis is sitting down, and so has a status or disposition according to which *it is false that Pope Francis is standing*. In addition, the word *rei*, here translated 'thing' can also mean 'reality.' So, the passage could be saying that how reality is disposed is what makes a thought true or false. That, though, is consistent with a denial of Truthmaker Maximalism.

I think similar stories can be told for the other passages that seem to support Truthmaker Maximalism in Aquinas's works. The context of these passages should make it clear that there are viable interpretations of the passages that are consistent with the denial of Truthmaker Maximalism. This, combined with the passages where Aquinas clearly espouses restrictions on a truthmaker principle leads one to think that we should understand the passages which seem to endorse Truthmaker Maximalism in light of the passages that clearly deny it, and not vice versa.

8. CONCLUSION

These are the only two restrictions to the range of the Thomistic truthmaker principle that I can find in Aquinas's writings: neither truths about the past

³⁹ Quod dispositio rei est causa veritatis in opinione et oratione.

and future nor truths about non-being require truthmakers to be true. Noting that a Thomistic truthmaker principle restricts truths about the past and the future from its scope precisely because, according to Aquinas, truths about the past and future are not about being, I take the following to be a concise statement of a Thomistic truthmaker principle:

(TTM): A true proposition, p stands in need of a truthmaker, T, if and only if p is a truth about being.

In this article I have defended this Thomistic truthmaker principle against objections and shown how to reconcile it with difficult passages in Aquinas's corpus which seem to contradict it. I believe this truthmaker principle can offer a better theory of truthmakers for existential, universal, and modal truths than others currently on offer, but that is an argument for another time.⁴⁰

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ABSTRACT: *In this article I provide a Thomistic truthmaker principle. Although Aquinas himself never provides a truthmaker principle, he does say things that show he thought many truths require truthmakers, or, in other terms, that truths have an ontological grounding. That truths are somehow grounded or explained by reality is an important aspect of Thomistic thought. The principle I provide could be affirmed by someone with Thomistic tendencies: it is consistent with Aquinas' thought and makes sense of some peculiar aspects of his writings. In what follows, I will argue that a Thomistic truthmaker principle should require all truths about being to have a truthmaker at any time that they are about (and I will explain what these two restrictions mean).*

KEYWORDS: *St. Thomas Aquinas, Truthmaking, Negative Existentials, Presentism, Eternalism.*