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IN DEFENCE OF AN ARGUMENT AGAINST TRUTHMAKER MAXIMALISM

Abstract. The paper analyses the argument proposed by Milne (2005) against truthmaker maximalism and shows that the objections raised to this argument by de Sa and Zardini, and Rodriguez-Pereyra are misguided because the first one misuses the vagueness of some terms; and the second one is based on a fallacy of *petitio principii* (this is exactly the same type of objection as it was raised by Rodriguez-Pereyra against the Milne's argument).[1]

Keywords: truthmakers; truthmaker maximalism; Milne; de Sa; Zardini; Rodriguez-Pereyra

It seems that whatever we claim to be true has to be in some way anchored in reality. Truthmaker theorists take this as claiming that every truth have something that makes it true, that is a truthmaker. For example, Armstrong wrote:

> I hold the view that every truth has a truthmaker. The truthmaker for a particular truth is that object or entity in the world in virtue of which that truth is true. [. . .] The truthmaker is the "correspondent" in the Correspondence theory of truth, but with the repudiation of the view that the correspondence involved is always one-one.
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> (Armstrong, 2000, p. 150)

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[1] This argument, firstly presented by Milne (2005), was independently discovered by the author of this paper in December of 2010 and introduced in the paper "Does every truth need a truthmaker?" (unpublished).

A difficult problem which remains for the truthmaker theorists, however, is to show that all truths do really have truthmakers. Milne (2005) argued that at least some truths do not have truthmakers and I would like to show that the objections raised against his reasoning by de Sa and Zardini, and Rodriguez-Pereyra are misguided. In the case of the argument of de Sa and Zardini, my paper can be seen as an implementation of the general strategy proposed by Armour-Garb and Woodbridge (2010, p. 11) intended to show that de Sa and Zardini's "arguments fail to undermine the instances of reasoning they attack, either because they fail to see everything that is at work in that reasoning, or because they misunderstand what it is that the reasoning aims to show."[2]

The truthmaker theory which appeared in the quotation from Armstrong — truthmaker maximalism TM — can be stated in the form:

TM Every true sentence has at least one truthmaker.

What Milne (2005) aimed to show, is that TM is false. For if we take into account the sentence M which is similar to the Gödel sentence:

M This sentence has no truthmaker.

it is easy to see that this sentence cannot have a truthmaker because otherwise it would be a true sentence which is self-contradictory. Hence, by *reductio ad absurdum*, M has no truthmaker. But if the sentence M does not have truthmaker and it says about itself that it has no truthmaker, it is *true* and in this way *does contradict TM*, which means that TM is false and should be abandoned. What Milne emphasized was that the key inferential step is a weak form of *reductio ad absurdum* valid in minimal logic (and in Priest's Logic of Paradox) and that M engenders no outright inconsistency (see (Milne, 2005, p. 222), (Milne, 2013, pp. 475–476) and (Priest, 1979)). The last point is important because — as Milne noted — "the truthmaker theorist might try to chisel apart [G]ödel sentences and M, and try to assimilate M to the Liar Paradox" (Milne, 2005, p. 222). As a matter of fact, Milne's opponents López de Sa and Zardini (2006), and Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006) applied this very strategy.

López de Sa and Zardini attempted to show that "the same form of argument [as Milne's argument] could be used to establish (the negation of) just about anything you please" (López de Sa and Zardini, 2006, p. 154). Their argument is based on the following sentence:

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[2] Unlike the author of this paper, Armour-Garb and Woodbridge (2010, p. 22) are convinced by Rodriguez-Pereyra's (2006) argument against Milne's position.

S This sentence is not both true and short.

The authors claim that arguing in a way "similar" to Milne it can be easily "proved" that S is not short:

> Suppose that S is both true and short. Then it is true. So what it says is the case is the case. Hence S is not both true and short. On the supposition that S is both true and short, it is not both true and short. By *reductio ad absurdum*, S is not both true and short. But this is just what S says. Hence S is true. Hence, since it is not both true and short, it is not short.   (López de Sa and Zardini, 2006, pp. 154–155)

> [. . .] that S is not short is inconsistent with the deliverances of our senses, but, unlike the Liar sentence, S itself gives rise to no inconsistency when treated as an ordinary sentence and subject to the usual rules of logic.   (López de Sa and Zardini, 2006, p. 156)

However, this counterargument is misguided and only misuses the vagueness of the term 'short' (it is not clear whether S should be treated as short or not); the supposed lack of inconsistency is an effect of this vagueness and it is easy to demonstrate that if we make this term more precise, it is impossible "to establish (the negation of) just about anything you please" (López de Sa and Zardini, 2006, p. 154). To show this, let us assume first that S is short (because we assume, for example, that 'short' means 'consisting of no more than 10 words'). Then, if we assume that S is both true and short, what it says is true and this means that it is not both true and short, and we have a contradiction. We obtain the same result — a contradiction — if we assume that S is short but not true, because S says that it is not both true and short and as such should be true. So, when shortness is truthfully predicated of S (which is an empirical fact), S becomes *logically inconsistent* exactly as in the case of the Liar Sentence because ascribing truth to S leads to its falsity and ascribing falsity leads to its truth. This would mean — contrary to what is claimed by the authors (López de Sa and Zardini, 2006, p. 156) — an *outright inconsistency* of S. And needless to say, nothing can be proved by logically inconsistent sentences.

On the other hand, if S is not short (because we assume, for example, that 'short' means 'consisting of no more than 5 words'), S is simply *true* and does not "establish (the negation of) just about anything you please" as well.

Because de Sa and Zardini claimed that "the same form of argument [as Milne's argument] could be used to establish (the negation of) just

about anything you please", I shall try to prove more generally that it is impossible. To show this, let us replace 'short' by F, where 'F' is any predicate you want (for example, 'consisting of 8 words'; or 'being the most important sentence of philosophy'; or 'being a flying hippo'):

S'　　This sentence is not both true and F.

We have now again two cases: F can be truthfully predicated of S', or not. In the first case, S' becomes *logically inconsistent* exactly as in the previous example of 'consisting of no more than 10 words' and as in the case of the Liar Sentence, which would mean again its *outright inconsistency*. But if S' is not F, S' is again simply *true* (exactly as in the previous example of 'consisting of no more than 5 words') and does not 'establish (the negation of) just about anything you please' as well.

It follows from these considerations that sentences of the type of S cannot be used against Milne's argument since they either lead to contradiction or simply are true sentences. The first result in not surprising, because the sentences of the type of S confuse object-language and metalanguage assigning truth-value to themselves, which results in similar consequences to the case of the Liar Sentence. Unlike S, the sentence M, which is used in Milne's argument, does not assign a truth-value to itself and is not logically inconsistent.

Milne's argument was also criticized by Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006), who tried to show that Milne begs the question against truthmaker maximalism *TM* because if we assume *TM*, then M is assimilable to the Liar Paradox and as such is logically inconsistent. It is, however, Rodriguez-Pereyra and not Milne, who made the classical *petitio principii* fallacy; the sentence M is, to all appearances, meaningful, like Gödel sentences (Milne, 2005, p. 222), and is true simply because it does not have any truthmaker, and this is exactly what this sentence states without logical inconsistency.[3] As I mentioned before, Milne suggested that the truthmaker theorist might try to employ strategy of chiseling apart M and Gödel sentence and assimilating M to the Liar Paradox (Milne, 2005, p. 222), and this is just the strategy which was used by Rodriguez-Pereyra. But it is obvious that this cannot be done on the basis of *TM* because it would lead to a fallacy of *petitio principii* in the case when *TM* is under discussion. Unfortunately, Rodriguez-Pereyra comitted

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[3] In the recently published paper, Milne tries to show that his argument is essentially object level, not at all semantic (Milne, 2013, p. 373–374).

this fallacy when he assumes that *M* is paradoxical as the Liar because *TM* makes the predicates 'is true' and 'has a truthmaker' equivalent (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2006, p. 261). With the same effect, Rodriguez-Pereyra could try to show, for example, that the theory of relativity is incorrect because if we *assume* Newtonian physics, the theory of relativity leads to contradictions (e.g. masses of particles are constant — as in Newtonian physics — and are not constant when their velocities are changing — as in the theory of relativity).

There is no symmetry between *M* and *TM*; the fundamental difference between them is that, in contrast to *M*, the sentence *TM* is not true in virtue of what this sentence states.

I conclude that Milne's argument has not been proven false-not by the analyzed counterarguments, anyway.

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