

**Phil 420: *Metaphysics*
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[Handout 10]

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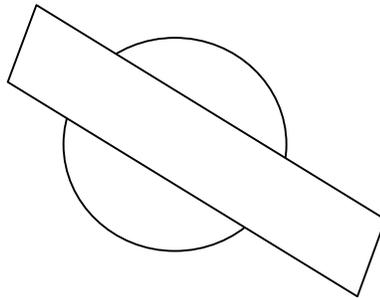
Nelson Goodman: *Ways of Worldmaking* [II]

§ A Puzzle about Perception [Chapter V]

The visual system is persistent, inventive, and sometimes rather perverse in building a world according to its own lights; the supplementation is deft, flexible, and often elaborate. [JL: Our eyes/consciousness could “fill in” things that are not there; they can also delete things that are there]

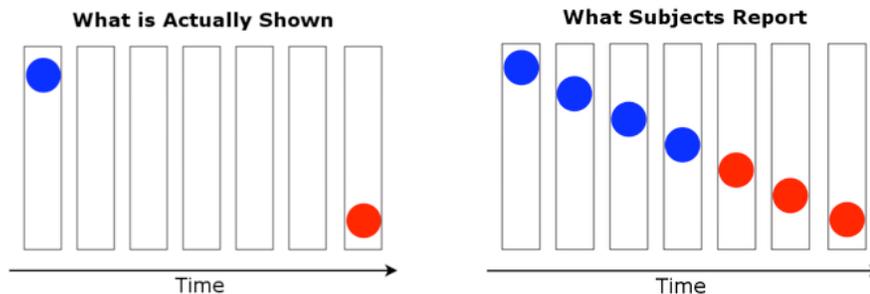
Example:

— We strive mightily and resourcefully, consciously and automatically, to supply whatever is required to join separate pieces into one object or pseudo-object, as in the familiar cases of this figure:



But unless we somehow manage – perceptually or conceptually or conjecturally – to fill in between the two separated entities or events, we resist combining them into one thing.

*** the color phi phenomenon: the illusion of motion**



Goodman’s interpretation: Virtually every clear case of visual motion perception depends on abrupt shift in color.

The Implications:

___ The task of finding the facts does not become arbitrary or pointless when the facts are of 'apparent' rather than of 'real' or of physical motion. "Apparent" and "real" here are insidiously prejudicial labels for facts of different kinds. Just as the motion of a dot across a screen is sometimes 'not there' in stimulus or object, so the separate static flashes are sometimes 'not there' in perception.

What we have been looking at are some striking examples of *how perception makes its facts.*

§ The Fabrication of Facts [Chapter VI]*** Goodman's declaration:**

___ My title, "The fabrication of facts", has the virtue of ... irritating those fundamentalists who know very well that facts are found not made, that facts constitute the one and only real world, and that knowledge consists of believing the facts. These articles of faith so firmly possess most of us, they so bind and blind us, that "fabrication of fact" has a paradoxical sound. "Fabrication" has become a synonym for 'falsehood' or "fiction" as contrasted with "truth" or "fact." Of course, we must distinguish falsehood and fiction from truth and fact; but we cannot, I am sure, do it on the ground that fiction is fabricated and fact found.

*** *The perceptual is no more a rather distorted version of the physical facts than the physical is a highly artificial version of the perceptual facts. (92-3)***

* "Facts" like "meaning" is a syncategorematic (syn·cat·e·gor·e·mat·ic adj used to describe an expression that has meaning only in conjunction with another expression) term; for facts, after all, are obvious factitious (not real or natural but artificial or invented)... As meanings vanish in favor of certain relationships among terms, so facts vanish in favor of certain relationships among versions. (93)

* Facts are theory-laden; they are as theory-laden as we hope our theories are fact-laden. (96-7)

*** Goodman's radical relativism (with the following restraints):**

- 1. Willingness to accept countless alternative truth or right world-versions does not mean that everything goes, that tall stories are as good as short ones, that truths are no longer distinguished from falsehoods.**
- 2. However, truth should not be conceived as correspondence with a ready-made world (because there is no "ready-made world").**
- 3. Though we make worlds by making versions, we do not make a world by putting symbols together at random.**
- 4. Multiple worlds are just the actual worlds made by and answering to *true* or *right* versions.**
- 5. *False* versions (e.g. mere *possible* worlds) have no place in my philosophy.**

Q: What world-versions are true or right then?

Nominalism (Goodman's)	Physicalism
Authorizes an abundance of alternative versions based on physical particles or phenomenal elements or ordinary things or whatever else one is willing to take as individuals.	Admits of only one correct (even if yet unidentified) basis – physical basis to be discovered by the “finished” physics.

The motto: *never mind mind, essence is not essential, and matter doesn't matter.* ☺

* This does not mean that right versions must be arrived at casually, or that worlds are built from scratch. We start, on any occasion, with some old version or world that we have on hand and that we are stuck with until we have the determination and skill to remake it into a new one.... Worldmaking begins with one version and ends with another.

*** Some Ancient Worlds**

[pre-Socrates]:

___ These philosophers, like most of us, started from a world concocted of religion, superstition, suspicion, hope, and bitter and sweet experience.

___ Here are precursors of current campaigns, by friends and enemies of physical objects or phenomena or concreta or qualities or mind or matter, against or for dispensing with any of these in favor of others.

(JeeLoo's examples:

___ the Christian world

___ the Egyptian world

___ the Chinese world

___ the native Americans' world

___ the physicalistic world

.....

In one world we have a God; in another we have multiple gods. In one world we have ghosts and spirits; in another only physical things exist, in one world the fundamental element in the universe is matter; in another it is *qi*. These are all considered as “facts” by each culture. How do we say which world is true or right and which is false?

JeeLoo's answer: I now think it is a matter of choice, based on our preferences, the things we hold on to and the things we refuse to accept.

Q: What do you think?)

The worlds of fiction, poetry, painting, music, dance and the other arts are built largely by such non-literal devices as metaphor, by such non-denotational means as exemplification and expression, and often by use of pictures or sounds or gestures or other symbols of nonlinguistic systems. → The arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding. (102)

e.g. “Don Quixote”, taken literally, applies to no one, but taken figuratively, applies to many of us ...

Goodman’s conclusion:

___ My outline of the facts concerning the fabrication of facts is of course itself a fabrication.

___ **However: Not everything goes; no laissez-faire – Standards distinguishing right from wrong versions become more important in this view. Truth is often inapplicable, is seldom sufficient, and must sometimes give way to competing criteria. (107)**

§ Rightness of Rendering World-versions [Chapter VII]

*** Worlds in Conflict**

With multiple and sometimes unreconciled and even unreconcilable theories and descriptions recognized as admissible alternatives, our notions about truth call for some reexamination.

What standard of rightness is the counterpart of truth for works that present worlds by exemplification or expression?

*** Rightness** (not in the sense of moral or ethical “rightness”)

[rightness]

___ **This notion includes, along with truth, standards of acceptability that sometimes supplement or even compete with truth where it applies, or replace truth for non-declarative renderings.**

*** Truth**

Most of us learned long ago such fundamental principles:

- (i) truth never really conflict,
- (ii) all true version are true in the only actual world
- (iii) apparent disagreements among truths amount merely to differences in the frameworks or conventions adopted.

While most of us also learned a little later to mistrust [these] fundamental principles, I am afraid that my remark about conflicting truths and multiple actual worlds may be passed over as purely rhetorical. **They are not.**

*** The Fabrication of *Facts***

Example:

- (P) Under the correct system in question, every point has correlated with it a combination of a vertical and a horizontal line.
- (Q) Under (another) correct system in question, no point has correlated with it a combination of any other elements.

These are completely compatible with each other.

In any case, if the composition of points of lines or of lines out of points is conventional rather than factual, points and lines themselves are no less so.

And so we may regard the disagreements as not about the facts but as due to differences in conventions – of lines, points, regions, and modes of combinations – adopted in organizing or describing the space.

** When we strip off as layers of convention all differences among ways of describing it, what is left? The onion is peeled down to its empty core. (118)*



In short, if we abstract from all features responsible for disagreements between truths we have nothing left but versions without things or facts or worlds.

The realist will resist the conclusion that there is no world; the idealist will resist the conclusion that all conflicting versions describe different worlds. As for me, I find these views equally delightful and equally deplorable – for after all, the difference between them is purely conventional.

In practice, of course, we draw the line wherever we like, and change it as often as suits our purposes.

*** Tests and Truth [Or: What constitutes *truth*?]**

___ Possible candidates: correspondence, coherence, utility (pragmatic)

* Even where there is no conflict, truth is far from sufficient. Some truths are trivial, irrelevant, unintelligible, or redundant; too broad, too narrow, too boring, too bizarre, too complicated; etc.

* Truth is no more a necessary than a sufficient consideration for a choice of a statement. Not only may the choice often be of a statement that is the more nearly right in other respects over one that is the more nearly true, but where truth is too finicky, too uneven, or does not fit comfortably with other principles, we may choose the nearest amenable and illuminating lie. (121)

* We must use some tests in judging truths; and such features as **utility** and **coherence** are prominent candidates. That we can readily produce ostensible examples of useless tangled truths and of useful neat falsehoods shows at most only that **the tests are corroborative rather than conclusive**. (122)

* A statement is true, and a description or representation right, for a world it fits.

* Rather than attempting to subsume descriptive and representational rightness under truth, we shall subsume truth along with these under the general notion of *rightness of fit*. (132)

§ What Constitutes “Rightness”?

* A **deductive** argument is *right* in a fuller sense only if the premiseses are true and the inferences valid.

* An **inductive** rightness, on the other hand, consists of conformity with principles that codify practice. Inductive validity is one step further removed from truth than is deductive validity, for valid inductive inference from true premises need not yield a true conclusion. (126)

Rightness of induction requires:

- (i) Rightness of predicates projected – we must use only “projectible” predicates (such as ‘green’ and ‘blue’) but not unprojectible ones (such as ‘grue’ or ‘bleen’).
- (ii) Rightness of inference – The argument must proceed from premiseses consisting of all such true reports on examined instances as are in terms of projectible predicates.
- (iii) Rightness of categorization – the categories must be inductively right. However, what counts as a “right” category may be due to habits, our inertia, or convenience. Categories that are inductively right tend to coincide with categories that are right for science in general; but variations in purpose may result in variations in relevant kinds.

A primary factor in *projectibility* is habit, the decision normally goes to the one with the better entrenched predicates. Obviously there must be leeway for progress, for the introduction of novel organizations that make, or take account of, newly important connections and distinctions. Inertia is modified by inquiry and invention, somewhat restrained in turn by entrenched general ‘background’ principles, and so on.

Good practice depends upon habit in continual revision under frustration and invention. When the outcomes of rightly made predictions are wrong, the failures may be blamed on bad luck or, if they prominent or plentiful, may call for amendment of what constitutes good practice. (p. 136)

According to present practice, the blue-green categorization is right and the grue-bleen categorization wrong as marking the lines along which we make our inductive reasoning.

Induction according to nonprojectible categories is not merely awkward but wrong, whatever may be the outcome of the inductive conclusion drawn.

§ **Goodman’s Conclusion:** (138-40)

1. **Truth of statements and rightness of descriptions, representations, etc., is primarily a matter of fit: fit to what is referred to in one way or another, or to other renderings, or to modes and manners of organization.**
2. **Knowing or understanding is seen as ranging beyond the acquiring of true beliefs to the discovering and devising of fit of all sorts.**
3. **Rather than being able to justify our confidence in inductive inference or in the procedures for taking fair samples, we look to the confidence itself for whatever justification there may be for those procedures.**
4. **The line between artistic and scientific judgment does not coincide with the line between subjective and objective.**