

**PHIL 470: Seminar: Metaphysics & Epistemology
Truth and Reality**

Handout (14)

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Nelson Goodman: *Ways of Worldmaking* [I]

Note: In Goodman there are a lot of enigmatic remarks. I shall put these remarks down with the sign “*” so that we can discuss them in class.

§ Introduction

Major Theses:

- 1. The multiplicity of worlds**
- 2. The speciousness of ‘the given’**
- 3. The creative power of the understanding**
- 4. The variety and formative function of symbols**

Q: In what sense are there many worlds?

Q: What distinguishes genuine from spurious worlds?

Q: What are worlds made of?

Q: How are worlds made?

Q: What role do symbols play in the making?

Q: How is Worldmaking related to knowing?

§ The Multiplicity of Worlds

We are not speaking in terms of multiple possible alternatives to a single actual world but of multiple actual worlds.

e.g. ‘The sun always moves.’
‘The sun never moves.’

___ We are inclined to regard the two strings of words not as complete statements with truth-values of their own but as elliptical for some such states as “Under frame of reference A, the sun always moves” and “Under frame of reference B, the sun never moves” – statements that may both be true of the same world.

* We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe consists of these ways rather than of a world or of worlds.

The pluralist, far from being anti-scientific, accepts the sciences at full value. His typical adversary is the physicalist who maintains that physics is preeminent and all-inclusive, such that every other version must eventually be reduced to it or rejected as false or meaningless.

Q: Can all branches of knowledge about the world be ultimately reduced to physics?

§ Perception without Conception?

Kant: “Conception without perception is empty; perception without conception is blind.”

Talk of unstructured content or an unconceptualized given or a substratum without properties is self-defeating, for the talk imposes structure, conceptualizes, ascribes properties.

§ Ways of Worldmaking

* Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand: the making is a remaking.

- (a) **composition and decomposition** – taxonomy; kinds; organization; identification; names, etc.

The famous example of ‘grue’ – examined before a given date and green, or not so examined and blue

* The uniformity of nature we marvel at or the reliability we protest belongs to a world of our own making.

- (b) **Weighing** – deciding the relevance of criteria; deciding on the importance or unimportance of features; evaluating the utilities or value, etc.

e.g. works of art: a Piero della Francesca *Christ* and a Rembrandt one belong to worlds organized into different kinds.

* Yesterday’s level world seems strangely perverted; yesterday’s realistic calendar landscape becomes a repulsive caricature.

- (c) **Ordering** – ordering of derivation

Nothing is primitive or is derivationally prior to anything apart from a constructional system.

* Daily time is marked off into twenty-four hours, and each of these into sixty minutes of sixty seconds each. Whatever else may be said of these modes of organization, they are not ‘found in the world’ but *built into a world*.

(d) **Deletion and Supplementation** – deleting details or supplementing details

e.g. Giacometti’s man

* Our capacity for overlooking is virtually unlimited, and what we do take in usually consists of significant fragments and clues that need massive supplementation.

* Memory edits more ruthlessly.

The scientist is no less drastic, rejecting or purifying most of the entities and events of the world of ordinary things while generating quantities of filling for curves suggested by sparse data, and erecting elaborate structures on the basis of meager observations.

e.g. thermometer; scale; music notation, and the perception of motion

___ Sometimes motion in the perceptual world results from intricate and abundant fleshing out of the physical stimuli.

(e) **Deformation** – reshaping or deformations that may be considered either corrections or distortions.

e.g. Picasso’s Las Meninas (after Velasquez)

These are ways worlds are made – I do not say *the* ways.

* There is no more a unique world of worlds than there is a unique world.

§ **Trouble with Truth**

* Truth, far from being a solemn and severe master, is a docile and obedient servant.

Q: What are the criteria for success in making a world?

___ * While readiness to recognize alternative worlds may be liberating, ..., a willingness to welcome all worlds builds none.

Insofar as a version is verbal and consists of statements, truth may be relevant. But truth cannot be defined or tested by agreement with ‘the world.’ ___ Truth pertains solely to what is said, and literal truth solely to what is said literally. We risk confusion when we speak of pictures or predicates as “true of” what they predict or apply to; they have no truth value and may represent or denote some things and not others.

* “The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” would thus be a perverse and paralyzing policy for any world-maker. The whole truth would be too much; it is too

vast, variable, and clogged with trivia. The truth alone would be too little, for some right versions are not true – being either false or neither true nor false – and even for the true versions rightness may matter more.

* A world without kinds or order or motion or rest or pattern, is a world not worth fighting for or against.

* This world, indeed, is the one most often taken as real; for reality in a world, like realism in a picture, is largely a matter of habit.

§ Knowledge

Knowledge cannot be exclusively or even primarily a matter of determining what is true. Much of knowing aims at something other than true, or any, belief.

* Worlds are as much made as found; knowing is as much remaking as reporting.