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GOODMANIAN RELATIVISM

Nelson Goodman's work is universally regarded as pioneering and fundamental, and his attempts to clarify the nature of induction, symbol systems, art, theorizing and understanding have received and continue to receive great attention. Central to that work is a view Goodman describes as "radically relativist." Goodman's unusual brand of relativism, however, while basic to the entire Goodman corpus, has yet to be carefully delineated and studied. I hope in this paper to begin such a study. I will first briefly review the development of Goodmanian relativism through his earlier books and articles. Then I will develop a more detailed and elaborate account of the relativist position Goodman develops in his most recent book, *Ways of Worldmaking*.¹ Because Goodman's relativism is significantly different from more traditional accounts of relativism, I will attempt to shed light on Goodmanian relativism by contrasting it with those more traditional accounts. Finally, I will argue that there is a crucial ambiguity in Goodman's portrayal and defense of relativism, having to do with the role of "criteria of rightness" in Goodman's system, and that this ambiguity licenses two quite distinct versions of Goodmanian relativism. I will argue that the weak version of relativism is defensible, and important, but that the strong, or "radical," relativist position suffers from a fatal flaw. My hope is that the paper will serve to clarify not only Goodman's position, but epistemological relativism more generally.

A Brief History of the Development of Goodmanian Relativism

Goodman reassures us in the foreword to the latest edition of *The Structure of Appearance*² that in his view that structure is not unique; rather, he says, in his characterization of appearance "relativism runs throughout."³ The relativism that runs throughout *SA* is a *systematizati-*
onal one—the view, as one interpreter of Goodman puts it, that "conflic-
ting systematizations can be found for any prephilosophical subject
matter."⁴ There is, according to Goodman, no privileged system which has
any special priority—epistemological or otherwise—in the task of describ-
ing reality. Rather, there may be many purposes for constructing such
descriptions, and a system that suits one purpose may well be inferior to
another system with respect to some other purpose. Moreover, questions of

ontology are relative to system. That is, what is "fundamental" in one system need not be in another. Since for Goodman no system is generally superior to every other, and no description can be had save by the use of some system, no claims regarding basic ontology can be made in a systemless or system-neutral way. Thus the pursuit of a basic ontology of the world is for Goodman a pointless endeavor.³ Choice of system is relative to pragmatic considerations. So whether or not one should construe the world as being made up fundamentally of phenomenal elements such as qualia, or of physical elements such as objects, depends on the purposes of the construal. There is no system-neutral answer to the question "What is there?"⁴

It is important to note that Goodmanian relativism in *SA* does not come to the view that all systems are equally worthwhile, that there is no choosing from among alternative systems. Given pragmatic constraints and specific purposes, it is quite straightforward to establish that, relative to those constraints and purposes, one system is preferable to another. Thus if one wants a characterization of a theory that does not contain "theoretical" predicates, but does not mind an infinity of axioms, one can characterize the theory by the Craig method; whereas if one's purposes are different, so that one is willing to abide theoretical predicates but not an infinite number of axioms, then the Craig systematization is less acceptable than some other. So, while there is no unique, system-neutral answer to the question "does theory *T* have a finite number of axioms?", it is possible for pragmatic considerations to function as trans-system criteria by which objective evaluations of the worth of alternative systematizations can, relative to those considerations, be made. We shall return to this point below.

Goodmanian relativism is developed further in his essay, "The Way the World Is." Here Goodman makes plain his view that there is no one way the world, or even some small part of the world, is, but rather that there are as many ways the world is as there are true descriptions of it:

There are many different equally true descriptions of the world, and their truth is the only standard of their faithfulness. And when we say of them that they all involve conventionalizations, we are saying that no one of these different descriptions is *exclusively* true, since the others are also true. None of them tells us *the* way the world is, but each of them tells us *a* way the world is.

If I were asked what is *the food* for men, I should have to answer "none." For there are many foods. And if I am asked what is *the way* the world is, I must likewise answer, "none." For the world is many ways. The mystic holds that there is some way the world is and that this way is not captured by any description. For me, there is no way that is the way the world is; and so of course no description can capture it. But there are many ways the world is, and every true description captures one of them. The difference between my friend [the mystic] and me is, in sum, the enormous difference between absolutism and relativism.⁵

Here Goodmanian relativism again underscores the point that alternative systematizations are possible, and that there is no "privileged" absolutist framework which better serves to organize our descriptions than other frameworks. If a description is true, it describes a way the world is, even though it is made relative to some system or framework.⁶ Relativity of framework thus does not preclude objective characterization of the world. Goodman sees truth here as a system-neutral or trans-system notion by means of which descriptions can be sorted. Truth is, at least in *WWI*, not system-relative, and Goodmanian relativism amounts only to the rejection of any absolute, privileged system in terms of which all descriptions must be made.

So, for the Goodman of *WWI*, there are many ways the world is; many true descriptions of the world. But there are also many ways the world *isn't*; many false descriptions of the world. Goodman is here committed to there being system-neutral criteria by which system-relative descriptions of the world can be judged. As we are about to see, later versions of Goodmanian relativism are not so clear on this point.

Ways of Worldmaking: Rightness and Relativism

Ways of Worldmaking is Goodman's most recent articulation of his long-standing view that a fundamental sort of epistemic activity is *construction*—we *make* things (objects, paintings, theories, etc.) which are both the expression and the object of judgment and understanding. We construct world-versions, or, more simply, versions, by manipulating symbols in ways Goodman has long studied.¹⁰

Goodman argues, in *WW*, for the acceptance of alternative, conflicting true or right world-versions, but, as in earlier articulations of his relativist stance, he denies that it is his view that "everything goes":

Willingness to accept countless alternative true or right world-versions does not mean that everything goes, that tall stories are as good as short ones, [or] that truths are no longer distinguished from falsehoods. . . .¹¹

The multiple worlds I countenance are just the actual worlds made by and answering to true or right versions. (94)

So, according to the view put forward in *WW*, versions can be true or false, right or wrong; even though truth or rightness cannot be conceived as "correspondence with a ready-made world" (94), still there are standards of rightness which it now becomes crucial to uncover and articulate. This becomes the central task of Goodman's inquiry:

We must, then, inquire into the standards . . . of rightness of renderings of all sorts, in all media, in symbol systems of every variety. This strikes me as one of the most pressing problems of present-day philosophy. . . .¹²

Goodman is thus centrally interested in distinguishing genuine from spurious worlds, true from false descriptions, right from wrong versions. The standards of rightness Goodman seeks constitute the "rigorous restraints" on his "radical relativism." Our task now is to come to grips with rightness.

Rightness

The first thing to note is that rightness cannot be construed as truth. A version may be right but not true; incompatible versions may both be right; and to some right versions standards of truth are not even applicable:

Not only does countenancing unreconciled alternatives put truth in a different light, but broadening our purview to include versions and visions that make no statements and may even not describe or depict anything requires consideration of standards other than truth. Truth is often inapplicable, is seldom sufficient, and must sometimes give way to competing criteria. (107)

The competing criteria are, of course, criteria of rightness, which outstrip considerations of truth:

... with our view of worldmaking expanded far beyond theories and descriptions, beyond statements, beyond language, beyond denotation even, to include versions and visions metaphorical as well as literal, pictorial and musical as well as verbal, exemplifying and expressing as well as describing and depicting, the distinction between true and false falls far short of marking the general distinction between right and wrong versions. (109)

How then do we so distinguish? What are the "standards of acceptability" (110) which sometimes supplement, sometimes compete with, and sometimes replace considerations of truth in determining the acceptability of versions? Goodman's enigmatic solution is *fit*:¹³

A statement is true, and a description or representation right, for a world it fits. (132)

... truth of statements and rightness of descriptions, representations, exemplifications, expressions ... 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. (138)

Rightness most generally is "a matter of fit with practice." (138) Rightness of categorization is a matter of that categorization successfully organizing practice; rightness of deductive inference is a matter of fit with deductive practice; and similarly for rightness of inductive inference and sampling technique. (125-40) Likewise, the rightness of a painting, or a novel, or a dance, or a simple descriptive statement, is also a matter of fit with practice:

Whether a picture is rightly designed or a statement correctly described is tested by examination and reexamination of the picture or statement and what it refers to in one way or another, by trying its fit in varied applications and with other patterns and statements. (139)

I must confess that I find Goodman's discussion of "fit" somewhat obscure, and not without its difficulties. What is it, I wonder, to "fit with practice"? Assuming this notion clear, doesn't this formulation give too much weight to practice? Surely there are cases in which what fits fits into a practice which is itself open to challenge. In such cases, where the fit is good but the practice not, it seems inappropriate to label such versions "right." Consider, for example, a mathematical proof challenged on intuitionist grounds: the proof fits standard deductive practice, but that practice is itself challenged by the intuitionist. Is it not question-begging against the intuitionist to call the proof right, even though it "fits with practice"? Or consider the ill-informed auto mechanic in some remote part of the globe, whose garage is equipped with air compressor and some pneumatic hand tools, but not the pneumatic "gun" for removing/fastening lug nuts when changing tires. Her practice is of removing lug nuts by hand. She hears of, and adopts, a new wrench which improves leverage, and so makes such removal easier. Is the new method right? According to Goodman's discussion, as I understand it, it is—even though the original practice is in obvious need of the pneumatic gun, in the advent of which the new wrench would be otiose. Here again it seems unfortunate to label a version which fits with practice "right," when the practice itself is open to challenge and improvement. Indeed, it seems that anything can be right in that it can be seen to fit some practice, if we are only perverse enough, or liberal enough, in our consideration of practices. Of course Goodman allows that practice, and habit, can be amended and improved. (128, 135-7) But how do we know what constitutes improvement? In order to make such assessments, we must be able to criticize practices—for Goodman, presumably, this would be done in terms of our purposes—but then our purposes must themselves be subject to critical assessment, or else our perverse purposes would sanction our perverse practices. Moreover, to appeal to some criterion for assessing practices is to unhinge Goodman's analysis of rightness in terms of fit with practice, for that practice itself must then be right in order for fit with it to count as a condition of rightness.¹³

So I am not satisfied that Goodman's account of rightness is adequate for his purposes. At a minimum, much more needs to be said concerning rightness and fit for these notions to do the work Goodman wants them to do in his system.¹⁴ However, whatever the inadequacies in Goodman's ac-

count of rightness, I propose to ignore them from here on in, for the most interesting questions raised by this account involve its relation to Goodman's thesis of "radical relativism under rigorous restraints." It is to a consideration of Goodmanian relativism that we now turn.

Relativism

Goodman's version of relativism (henceforth "GR") is a unique and perplexing one. He calls it a radical relativism, which it seems to be, based as it is on his theses that facts are fabricated; that worlds are made, not found; and that contrary versions, conflicting truths, and unreconcilable theories can all be right. (109–10) Truth itself is relative, on Goodman's current picture,¹² as in rightness. (139) This is a radical relativism indeed, in which, it seems, anything goes. But Goodman places "rigorous restraints" on relativism, and emphatically denies that anything goes:

That right versions and actual worlds are many does not obliterate the distinction between right and wrong versions, does not recognize merely possible worlds answering to wrong versions, and does not imply that all right alternatives are equally good for every or indeed for any purpose (20–21).¹³

What I have said so far plainly points to a radical relativism; but severe restraints are imposed. Willingness to accept countless alternative true or right world-versions does not mean that everything goes, that tall stories are as good as short ones, [or] that truths are no longer distinguished from falsehoods. . . . The multiple worlds I countenance are just the actual worlds made by and answering to true or right versions. Worlds possible or impossible supposedly answering to false versions have no place in my philosophy. (94)

Here GR seems not radical at all, since "what goes" must meet Goodman's criteria of rightness. The restraints on acceptable versions are indeed rigorous and severe.

Or are they? GR is restrained by criteria of rightness, but rightness is itself relative and a version can be right in one system but wrong in another. Rightness is relative to system. Systems themselves are neither true or false, right nor wrong; they are judged solely in terms of their "efficacy in worldmaking" (129), and efficacy is itself relative to system. So rightness is relative to system, and systems cannot be wrong. Haven't the severe and rigorous restraints on relativism then been broken? If any version can be right, given an appropriate system, and if there are no constraints on appropriate systems save our ingenuity in concocting system-relative "efficacious" ones, then doesn't "everything go"? Do Goodman's restraints dissolve, so that GR is an extreme and radical relativism after all?

I will argue that there is a deep tension in GR, and that GR admits of both a weak and a strong (radical) version. I will argue further that the radical version of GR is untenable, for it succumbs to difficulties of a

general sort, which defeat any radically relativist view. The task at hand is to clarify GR—to delineate the weak and strong versions of GR—and to assess those versions. This task will be facilitated by comparing GR with another contemporary relativism, that of Thomas Kuhn.

As is well known, Kuhn's view (despite his disclaimers¹⁴) is widely regarded as a relativistic one. Kuhn's view is taken to be relativistic in that it holds that the acceptance of one theory over another has nothing to do with evaluation according to neutral, objective criteria of evaluation. Proponents of competing paradigms each judge their own paradigm to be superior to its rivals, according to criteria their own paradigm dictates. Consequently, a given paradigm (P_1) is held to be superior according to the criteria dictated by P_1 , by the proponents of P_1 ; while a rival paradigm (P_2) is held to be superior according to the criteria dictated by P_2 , by the proponents of P_2 . This renders paradigm-evaluation relativistic in the following sense: which paradigm is judged to be superior depends on which set of criteria of evaluation one judges by. P_1 is superior relative to the criteria dictated by P_1 , but not relative to those dictated by P_2 . P_2 is superior relative to the criteria dictated by P_2 , but not relative to those dictated by P_1 . Since Kuhn argues that there are no neutral criteria available, evaluation is therefore relative to the criteria, hence the paradigm, appealed to. This is the sense in which his view is relativistic.

Kuhn's is a classic "radical" relativism. Evaluation can be done only from within some framework; there simply is no ground for neutrally evaluating alternative frameworks or paradigms. Evaluation of paradigms, and claims more generally, is thus inevitably and inescapably relative. For Kuhn, this result follows straightforwardly from incommensurability, which ultimately comes to the thesis that there are no neutral criteria by which paradigms (or systems, or frameworks) can themselves be judged.¹⁵ In short: incommensurability implies relativism.

If Kuhn's relativism is classic, so is the standard objection to it.¹⁶ Let us formulate the radical relativist (RR) thesis as follows:

(RR) For any knowledge-claim p , p can be evaluated (assessed, established, etc.) only according to (with reference to) a set of background principles and criteria of evaluation C_1, \dots, C_n ; and, given a different set (or sets) of background principles and criteria C_1', \dots, C_n' , there is no neutral (that is, neutral with respect to the two (or more) alternative sets of principles and criteria) way of choosing between the two (or more) alternative sets in evaluating p .

It immediately follows from RR that if p is evaluated differently according to the two different sets of principles and criteria—that is, for example, if p

is true (probably true, highly confirmed) according to $C_1 \dots C_n$, but false (probably false, poorly confirmed) according to $C_1' \dots C_n'$ —there is no way to evaluate these conflicting evaluations. p is true relative to $C_1 \dots C_n$, and false relative to $C_1' \dots C_n'$. Since there is no neutral way of evaluating $C_1 \dots C_n$ vis-à-vis $C_1' \dots C_n'$, there is no neutral way of evaluating conflicting evaluations of p . Such evaluations (of p) can only be carried out relative to one or another set of principles and criteria of evaluation.

The problem with RR is simple and straightforward: it leads to a *reductio*. If RR is true, then (by instantiating RR in the original formulation):

(RR') (Since RR is itself a knowledge-claim) RR can be evaluated (assessed, established, etc.) only according to (with reference to) a set of background principles and criteria of evaluation $C_1 \dots C_n$; and, given a different set (or sets) of background principles and criteria $C_1' \dots C_n'$, there is no neutral (that is, neutral with respect to the two (or more) alternative sets of principles and criteria) way of choosing between the two (or more) alternative sets in evaluating RR .

If RR is true, then, as RR' states, RR is itself relative to alternative, and equally legitimate, sets of background principles and criteria of evaluation. Since these alternative sets will suggest differing evaluations of RR , and since there is no way to neutrally pick one evaluation over and against any others, it follows that, if RR is true, then RR 's truth will vary according to the principles and criteria by which RR is evaluated. In particular, it follows that, if according to some set of criteria $C_1 \dots C_n$ RR is judged to be false (probably false, poorly confirmed), then if RR is true, (at least according to that set of criteria $C_1 \dots C_n$) RR is false.

The *reductio* can be generalized as follows: Assume (radical) relativism correct. Then the relativist position has strong, indeed compelling justification—it is a rationally justifiable position. Justification involves good reasons. But good reasons cannot be biased or non-neutral or arbitrary or framework-bound (by definition of "good reason"). Therefore, if we are justified in holding that relativism is correct, there must be some non-arbitrary, neutral, "absolute" framework or ground from which we can make that judgment. Thus relativism, which denies the possibility of such a framework, is incorrect. In short, if relativism is true, it must have a non-relativistic ground, which possibility it denies. Thus relativism, if true, is false. Thus relativism is false.¹⁹

For the Kuhnian relativist, then, for whom relativism results from incommensurability (understood as a lack of neutral criteria by which to judge alternative claims or versions), the *reductio* just sketched is a powerful refutation. In fact, the radical relativist seems to be at a loss even to ar-

ticulate her position, since she seems to have to assert that it is non-relatively the case that relativism is true. Here relativism of the sort we have been considering collapses into incoherence.²¹

To regain the thread of the present study: to what extent is Goodman a relativist of the Kuhnian sort, and so subject to the *reductio*? Is GR self-defeating? For Goodman, is it possible to "commense," i.e., to neutrally compare and evaluate alternative versions?

GR

Our answers to these questions will turn on the status of criteria of rightness in Goodman's view. Radical relativism ultimately fails because of its denial of neutral criteria by which alternative claims or versions can be judged. Does Goodman similarly deny the existence of such criteria? Unfortunately, there is a systematic ambiguity in WW which makes a straightforward answer to this question impossible. WW actually gives us two relativisms: a weak one (henceforth GR_1) according to which there are version-neutral criteria of rightness by which alternative versions can be judged; and a strong one (GR_2) according to which criteria of rightness are version-bound. Goodman thinks rightness is relative because alternative contrary versions can be right in different systems:

... rightness of design and truth of statement are alike relative to system: a design that is wrong in Raphael's world may be right in Seurat's, much as a description of the stewardess's motion that is wrong from the control tower may be right from the passenger's seat. . . . (139)

As he stresses throughout WW , though, this does not mean that "everything goes": given a system, a version's rightness is an objective matter (139), determinable by appeal to criteria of rightness.²² Thus versions can be wrong as well as right. Criteria of rightness are taken here to be version- and system-neutral, and so capable of guiding the objective evaluation of versions. This I want to call GR_1 , or weak relativism, for in no way does it preclude objective evaluation. On the contrary, it explicitly aims for such evaluation, and Goodman (as we have seen) acknowledges the establishment of such criteria as a central focus of his work. In fact, GR_1 seems to be a straightforward and natural extension of Goodman's pluralism (discussed earlier). According to GR_1 , there are many ways the world is; many true descriptions of the world. But there are also many ways that the world *isn't*; many false descriptions of the world. Moreover, thanks to recourse to criteria of rightness, we can differentiate between right and wrong, and true and false, versions. Goodman here wants to say: "Since we are relativists about the appropriateness of alternative frameworks, and the

truth of alternative versions, it is important to worry about and try to establish general criteria for determining the rightness of versions.²³ *GR*₁, then, in its acknowledgment of version-neutral criteria by which versions can be judged, is a relativism of a much weaker sort than the relativism stemming, e.g., from Kuhn's incommensurability thesis.²⁴

If this were all Goodman said about relativism, there would be no problem with *GR*. But there is a problem yet to be dealt with. As we have seen, Goodman escapes a Kuhnian radical relativism with *GR*, because according to *GR*₁ there are version- and system-neutral criteria of rightness by which versions can be objectively evaluated. However, can Goodman consistently hold that his criteria of rightness are in the relevant sense neutral? It appears that he cannot.

The crucial point is that the argument formulated in *WW* is itself a version concerning versions, systems, facts, etc. *WW* presents, we might say, a meta-version: a version of versions. In Goodman's meta-version, there are version-neutral criteria of rightness by which versions can be judged. But, as Goodman recognizes, his meta-version is itself only one of countless possible meta-versions. (107) So the restraints on radical relativism which keep it from being the case that "everything goes" in *GR*₁ are themselves relative to Goodman's meta-version. Relativity of versions re-arises at the level of meta-version. In short, it is the case that not "everything goes" only in Goodman's meta-version. And since Goodman allows that his is only one among incompatible meta-versions, he must also allow the equal legitimacy of meta-versions with alternative criteria of rightness, as well as meta-versions with no criteria of rightness at all. Thus Goodman's criteria of rightness cannot stand, as in *GR*₁, as version-neutral criteria. Rather, those criteria are relative to Goodman's meta-version, and alternative, incompatible meta-versions, which do not recognize Goodman's criteria, must be countenanced.

But of course if those alternatives are countenanced, then the rightness of versions is relative to the criteria of rightness (if there be such) employed by the meta-version from which the judgment of rightness is made. Alternative meta-versions will license alternative judgments of rightness. Some may even deny the legitimacy or meaningfulness of such judgments. And on Goodman's view all such meta-versions must be countenanced.

Thus on Goodman's meta-version a version cannot simply be right "for a world it fits" (132), for whether or not it fits, and indeed whether or not fitness is the proper determiner of rightness, depends on the meta-version one judges from. The rigorous restraints on radical relativism have dissolved, and radical relativism remains. Goodman is committed, then, to a radical relativism according to which neutral evaluation of versions is im-

possible. This strong or radical form of *GR*—call it *GR*₂—is very much like the Kuhnian relativism discussed earlier. For if criteria of rightness are relative, then, while in Goodman's version it is not the case that everything goes, it nevertheless remains that in rival versions anything might go, and in any case there will be no way to judge meta-versions, and so no way to choose from among incompatible judgments of rightness which flow from incompatible meta-versions. Thus the fundamentalist, the Goodmanian, and anyone else with a meta-version will be on an equal footing with respect to judgments of rightness.

Goodman presumably wants to say that his meta-version is *right*—not just in the sense that it satisfies his criteria of rightness, but that it is in some sense cognitively superior and preferable to rival meta-versions. Indeed, this is presumably what he is arguing in *WW*. The problem is that he cannot say this, given his meta-version's insistence (so to speak) that countless alternative and conflicting meta-versions must be recognized as legitimate and cannot be appropriately evaluated by appeal to the criteria of evaluation of his own meta-version.²⁴

Of course Goodman does not want this to be the upshot of his meta-version. He thinks his meta-version is better than (more right than?) the fundamentalist's. Nevertheless, this radical relativism is what Goodman's position is driven to, once it is recognized that his meta-version is itself a version, and that his account of criteria of rightness is only one among countless incompatible alternatives. Goodman offers his restraints on radical relativism, his criteria of rightness, to be version-neutral, and to pick out his version as right. But, by his own scheme, those restraints, those criteria cannot be seen as version-neutral, but rather must be seen as part of his meta-version—and so cannot non-question-beggingly pick out his version as right. Radical relativism, Goodman style (*GR*₂) remains.

Besides the problem just noted, there are additional difficulties with *GR*₂. First, it succumbs to the *reductio* discussed earlier in connection with Kuhn. If all meta-versions are on an equal footing according to *GR*₂, then meta-versions which are incompatible with *GR*₂, and which hold that all meta-versions are not on an equal footing, are to be taken as seriously as *GR*₂. Thus if *GR*₂ is right with respect to the status of alternative meta-versions, it is wrong from the perspective of (at least some of) those alternatives. The *reductio* can be generalized as earlier. Second, relatedly, it is not clear that *GR*₂ can be even coherently articulated. Goodman, in order to defend *GR*₂, seems to have to say that it is version-neutrally the case that rightness is relative to versions. But this is incoherent, since if rightness is relative to versions, it cannot be the case that this particular claim is itself version-neutrally right (or true). Indeed, it is not even clear that we can refer

to versions or systems as we have been doing, since given *GR*, what counts as a version or system must depend on some meta-version.²¹ Thus here again the simple articulability of *GR*, is problematic.

If *GR*, is impossible to articulate, let alone defend, what shall we say of Goodman's efforts in *WW* to provide a radical relativist position? The answer is clear: Goodman can escape the difficulties of *GR*, by retreating to *GR*. Since *GR*, is a position he wants to hold, all Goodman need do is patch up his system to avoid its yielding *GR*. He needs to avoid the dissolution of the "rigorous restraints" he has placed upon his relativism. That dissolution and its avoidance depend entirely on the status of those restraints: namely, the status of Goodman's criteria of rightness. If those criteria are taken to be version-bound, then the unacceptable *GR*, results, and the rigorous restraints on relativism collapse. But if those criteria are taken to be version-neutral, and to afford the possibility of objective evaluation of versions, then *GR*, results. This weaker sort of relativism avoids the difficulties noted thus far with *GR*. Goodman needs to take more seriously his own view that criteria of rightness afford the possibility of objective evaluation of versions.

This last point becomes obvious if we consider for a moment the nature of criteria. What is it to be a criterion? A necessary condition of something's successfully functioning as a criterion is that it discriminate or differentiate between items which meet it and items which do not. A dictionary can serve as a criterion of correct spelling at a spelling bee only because it can discriminate between words spelled correctly (i.e., spelled as the dictionary spells them) and words spelled incorrectly. Similarly, the U.S.D.A.'s criteria for meat-grading function as criteria because they can consistently and routinely differentiate between cuts which are "prime," "choice," "standard," "commercial," "utility," "cutter," and "canner" (in terms of fat content, degree of marbling, tenderness, juiciness, flavor, etc.). So, a putative criterion purports to discriminate or differentiate, a successfully functioning criterion does so. Consider now Goodman's criteria of rightness. In *GR*, they fail to discriminate between right versions and wrong versions, since at best they do so only from the perspective of Goodman's meta-version, and according to *GR*, alternative contrary meta-versions, which may yield alternative judgments of rightness (or deny the legitimacy of the category altogether), are to be equally countenanced. This is analogous to our judging a spelling bee by appealing to a dictionary which countenances all spellings of every word, or to our grading a piece of meat by appealing to a grading system that allows any piece of meat to be of any grade. In all these cases, the purported criteria fail to discriminate, and so fail to function successfully as criteria. We could say, then, that in *GR*, Goodman's criteria of rightness fail to discriminate

between right and wrong versions, and so fail to constitute rigorous restraints upon relativism. The criteria of rightness, in short, do not meet the criteria for criteria: they do not discriminate or differentiate, and so do not function successfully as criteria. Another way to put the point is that criteria must be taken to be version-neutral in order to have any force as criteria at all.

Goodman clearly wants his criteria of rightness to afford a means of legitimate evaluation of versions. He does not want to be committed to the view that "everything goes," that all versions are equally acceptable. This undesired (and undesirable) result follows if we understand *GR* as *GR*, but it is avoided if we take *GR* as *GR*. Goodman has opined that he views inquiry "into the standards . . . of rightness of renderings of all sorts . . . as one of the most pressing problems of present day philosophy. . . ." If so, he had better be advocating *GR*. For if he is advocating *GR*, general standards of rightness are, as I have been arguing, in principle unachievable. Holding to *GR*, undermines the inquiry into standards of rightness that Goodman regards as centrally important.

Putnam, in his commentary on *WW*,²² recognizes the problem for Goodman here. Putnam worries about the case in which "right" means "right for me," and notes the possibility of a culture's holding a radically relativist position (as Putnam says, "the young in California do say 'true for me'").²³ And in his closing he urges Goodmanians to avoid the radical relativist position, and to work towards the establishment of "rigorous standards for distinguishing right from wrong."²⁴ But Goodman, in his reply to Putnam, resists Putnam's attempt to short-circuit *GR*. He writes:

Standards of credibility do not vary with individual opinion; they are constant in the world of worlds sketched in my book but may vary from one world of worlds to another.²⁵

Here Goodman wants the impossible. For if standards may vary from one world of worlds—i.e., meta-version—to another, then they may well vary with individual opinion. At least, they will if individuals espouse alternative meta-versions (worlds of worlds). In short, if meta-versions can vary with individual opinion, so, contrary to Goodman, can standards of credibility and of rightness. So Goodman's reply, offered as an attempt to discount Putnam's suggestion that *WW* offers in the end a radically relativist view in which standards vary with individual opinion, does not alleviate Putnam's worry.²⁶

Conclusion

It must be emphasized that (at least in some passages) Goodman does take his constraints on relativism seriously, and so rejects the sort of (Kuh-

nian) radical relativism in which "anything goes." In contrast with Kuhn, Goodman does not regard alternative versions as incomparable.¹ This Goodman—the Goodman of *GR*,—I regard as an ally in the battle against radical relativism. My aim in this paper, however, is to point out that other passages of *WW* seem to commit Goodman to the sort of radical relativism (i.e., *GR*) that he elsewhere rejects, and to argue that this latter sort of relativism is subject to the same sorts of difficulties as other forms of radical relativism. There is, as I have said, a tension in *WW* between relativisms of different strains and strengths. It is this ambiguity in *GR* which I have endeavored to point out; I have argued, in addition, that while one strand of *GR* is perfectly defensible, the other is not. It is this latter strand that has been the focus of my critical comments. The object of my criticism is not Goodmanian relativism as such, but only the radical form of it (*GR*) which aligns *GR* with other untenable versions of radical relativism.

If what has been said thus far is correct, then Goodman had best be advocating *GR*, not *GR*. *GR*, which is a pluralist rather than a radical relativist position, is sufficient to underwrite Goodman's central investigations into version-making through symbols and the general nature of symbol systems. In fact, Goodman had better hold *GR*, and not *GR*, if he wishes to investigate the nature of general standards of rightness of renderings, since, as we have seen, on *GR*, such standards are impossible.

WW is without doubt a rich and suggestive book, and is certain to spur research along the lines of Goodman's philosophical project. Nevertheless, as it stands there are specific difficulties with Goodman's rendition of irrealism, rightness, and relativism which call for rigorous restraint in affirming the rightness of Goodman's rendering.²

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NOTES

1. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1978). Henceforth referred to as *WW*. Page references in the text are to this work.
2. Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, Third Edition (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1977). First published in 1951. Henceforth *SA*.
3. *SA*, p. xiii.
4. Israel Scheffter, "The Wonderful Worlds of Goodman," *Synthese* 45 (1980), pp. 201–09. Citation is from p. 201.

5. Thus Goodman's ontological relativism differs markedly from Quine's, since for Quine there is a privileged system, namely that of physical theory, and so a basic (though relative) ontology, namely that of current physical theory. A helpful short introduction to Goodman's position is that of Geoffrey Hellman, "Introduction," in *SA*, pp. xix–xlvii.

6. *SA*, pp. 99–104.

7. "The Way the World Is" (henceforth *WWI*), reprinted in Goodman, *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), pp. 24–32 (henceforth *PP*). Originally published in *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 14 (1960), pp. 48–56.

8. *WWI*, pp. 30–31, emphasis in original.

9. Goodman does not claim (rightly, I think) that truth is itself a criterion by which descriptions are judged. Rather, truth for Goodman is the upshot of a description's meeting various other criteria. Goodman does not offer a special analysis of criteria of truth, so far as I am aware (though he does discuss tests of truth in *WW*, chapter 7). Indeed, if I understand him, there can be no such criteria (of truth), but only criteria of, e.g., credibility, or simplicity, such that, if a description met those criteria, that fact would tend to point to that description's being true.

10. In addition to *WW*, cf. also Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968). For a helpful discussion of the connection between "constructionalism" and relativism, cf. Chris Swower, "True For", in Jack W. Melland and Michael Krausz, eds., *Relativism: Cognitive and Moral* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), pp. 84–108.

In a longer (forthcoming) version of this paper, I discuss the way that Goodman's constructionalism leads naturally to the view he labels "irrealism", which is defended at length in *WW*. In the present version I instead proceed directly to the consideration of Goodman's discussion of "criteria of rightness", the status of which is crucial to my argument concerning Goodmanian relativism.

11. Goodman, "Replies," *Erkenntnis* 12, 1, 1978, p. 159.

12. It is perhaps worth pointing out the affinities between Goodman's discussion of "fit" and that of Hilary Putnam, in *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Putnam in that work embraces, and apparently regards as unproblematic, Goodman's analysis of fit (cf. pp. 54–55; 64; 123). In fact, Putnam's general position, which he terms "internal realism", is remarkably close to Goodman's "irrealism." (In addition to the pages just cited, cf. pp. 52–54; 79; also Putnam, "Realism and Reason", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 50, August 1977.)

13. I am here challenging Goodman's account of justification in terms of mutual accommodation of theory and practice (which Rawls labels "reflective equilibrium"). Cf. Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, fourth edition, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 62–66. Space forbids my pressing the challenge here. I do so in another article, "Justification By Balance" (in progress).

14. It must be noted that Goodman presents his discussion of rightness as tentative and preliminary. Consequently my remarks here should be taken as a call for further clarification, rather than as a final critique of a fully worked out position.

15. Note that the relativity of truth held in *WW* is a shift from the view put forth in *WWI* that truth is not relative.

16. The point is formulated slightly differently in its original presentation in Goodman, "Words, Works, Worlds," *Erkenntnis* 9, 1975, pp. 70–71.

17. A detailed recounting and accounting of the debate between Kuhn and his critics regarding relativism and related issues may be found in my "Objectivity, Rationality, Incommensurability, and More", *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 31 (1980), pp. 359-75, from which the following paragraph in the text is largely taken (p. 368). Cf. also my "Epistemological Relativism In Its Latest Form", *Inquiry* 23 (1980), pp. 107-17; and "Melland on Scheffler, Kuhn, and Objectivity in Science", *Philosophy of Science* 43 (1976), pp. 441-48.

18. Cf. "Objectivity, Rationality, Incommensurability, and More," cited in n17 above. On the line being taken here, "incommensurability" is best understood as an epistemological thesis concerning the impossibility of objective evaluation of scientific knowledge-claims, rather than as a thesis of philosophy of language or the theory of meaning. Of course proponents of the "incommensurability thesis" often support that thesis by appeal to considerations of meaning. But we should not confuse the nature of the thesis with the nature of the support for the thesis. Cf. my "Melland on Scheffler, Kuhn, and Objectivity in Science," cited in n17 above.

19. The following two paragraphs are taken from "Epistemological Relativism In Its Latest Form," cited in n17 above, pp. 115-16. For a much more detailed discussion of relativism and the problem of its logical incoherence, see my "Relativism, Truth, and Incoherence", (unpublished).

20. It must be pointed out that the *reductio* does not unfairly assume the existence of absolute criteria. It rather points out that the relativist must appeal to such criteria in order to make the case for relativism. This paragraph is taken from my "Relativism Refuted", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 14, 1982, pp. 47-50.

I must acknowledge that the preceding "demonstration" of the incoherence of relativism is "quick and dirty"; much more needs to be said to clinch the case. For the full argument, cf. "Relativism, Truth, and Incoherence," cited in n19 above.

21. Cf. Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), chapter 1. Of course there is controversy as to the exact nature of Kuhn's commitment to relativism. My own view, argued for in "Objectivity, Rationality, Incommensurability, and More," cited in n17 above, is that, despite Kuhn's recent disclaimers, he remains committed to relativism because he continues to hold to incommensurability, from which relativism follows. In any case, for present purposes it matters little what Kuhn holds, for he is being used here only as a foil by which to better understand Goodman's brand of relativism.

There have been many relativists in the history of philosophy, from Protagoras to Collingwood. In fact, at present we are undergoing something of a resurgence of relativism, as evidenced by, for example, Harold I. Brown, *Perception, Theory and Commitment* (Chicago, IL: Precedent Publishing, 1977); Jack W. Melland, "Concepts of Relative Truth," *The Monist* 60, no. 4, 1977, pp. 568-82; Melland, "On the Paradox of Cognitive Relativism," *Metaphilosophy* 11, 1980, pp. 115-27; Gerald Doppelt, "Kuhn's Epistemological Relativism: An Interpretation and Defense," *Inquiry* 21, 1978, pp. 33-86; and the writings of contemporary sociologists of knowledge such as David Bloor and Barry Barnes. While space forbids consideration of these new relativisms here, there can be no doubt that Goodman is not alone in his espousal of a radical relativism. (I have responded to Doppelt in "Epistemological Relativism in Its Latest Form," cited in n17 above; to Brown in "Brown on Epistemology and the New Philosophy of Science," *Synthese* 56, 1983, pp. 61-89; and to Melland in "Relativism, Truth, and Incoherence," cited in n19 above.)

22. Cf. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, cited in n12 above, p. 123. It follows that criteria of rightness are here taken to be *external* to the versions being evaluated. For the analogous issue with respect to Kuhn's claim that standards of paradigm-evaluation are *internal* to paradigms, cf. my "Objectivity, Rationality, Incommensurability, and More", cited in n17 above, and references to Scheffler, Shapere, and Kordig therein.

23. Cf. Hellman, cited in n5 above, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

24. There is an additional difficulty here, which underscores the problematic nature of Goodman's criterion of "fit." For suppose we could somehow overcome the problem just noted, and figure out a way for Goodman to claim that his meta-version is cognitively superior to or epistemically more worthy than rival meta-versions. Any argument in support of this claim would depend on the criteria his meta-version sets out, i.e., on his meta-version's "fit with practice." But (a) his meta-version in fact does *not* fit well, since our practice includes many assumptions of "absolutism"—we typically act, for example, as if there is a real world which exists independently of us and our versions, and that there are facts of the matter with respect to all sorts of questions and matters which might be found, but are not made, by us. Moreover (b) this just-mentioned fact illustrates the difficulty (noted earlier) stemming from the emphasis and weight Goodman's criteria put on fit with practice. For Goodman should want to hold, in arguing for the worthiness and preferability of his meta-version, that if his meta-version does not fit with our practice, it may nevertheless *still be right* or preferable to meta-versions which more closely fit our practice. Thus practice must itself admit of evaluation, in terms other than fit with itself, or else new practices and new views (such as Goodman's) could never turn out to be rationally preferable or superior to their ancestors.

25. This last point is well made in Hellman, cited in n5 above, p. xlii.

26. "Replies," *Erkenntnis* 12 (1978), p. 159. Cf. also *WW*, p. 107.

27. Hilary Putnam, "Reflections on Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*," *Journal of Philosophy* LXXVI, 1979, pp. 603-18.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 617.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 618, citing *WW*, footnote, pp. 109-10. It is ironic that (as others have pointed out) it is not clear that Putnam's positive view (his "internal realism") is not itself relativistic, and so open to the same difficulty he here points out for Goodman. But this point cannot be pursued here.

30. Goodman, "Credence, Credibility, Comprehension," *Journal of Philosophy* LXXVI, 1979, pp. 618-19. Citation is from p. 619.

31. In his fuller reply to Putnam ("On Starmaking," *Synthese* 45, 1980, pp. 211-15), Goodman extends the just-cited quote, and concludes that "Relativity goes all the way up." (211) Here again Goodman needlessly invites the difficulties that plague GR. If relativity occurs at the meta-level, then his rigorous restraints on radical relativism dissolve.

32. I am grateful to Catherine Z. Elgin for reminding me of this.

33. I am grateful to Nicholas Burbules, Catherine Z. Elgin, Sophie Haroutunian, Geoffrey Hellman, Edward Mooney, Denis Phillips, Israel Scheffler, Anthony Stigliano, and Joseph Ullian for insightful commentary on and incisive criticism of earlier drafts of this paper. I must emphatically point out that my expression of gratitude should not be taken as an indication of these commentators' endorsement of the substantive theses advanced above.