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THE STARRY HEAVENS ABOVE ME

AND THE STARMAKING POWER WITHIN ME

by

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ABSTRACT
THE STARRY HEAVENS ABOVE ME
AND THE STARMAKING POWER WITHIN ME

by

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Under the Supervision of Professor Robert Schwartz

The worldmaking thesis stands as a contentious view of reality. Its primary tenet, that we

play a role in cognitively making objects, properties, facts, and thereby the world, is

dismissed by many philosophers as an incoherent and misguided position. In this paper I

critically discuss the thesis and defend it against several criticisms: that (1) it is

cosmologically incoherent, (2) raises a problem of causation, (3) implies subjectivism, (4)

commits a use-mention fallacy, and (5) it commits the problem of disagreement. I show

that these criticisms are not ultimately deleterious to the thesis. Furthermore, I explore

ways in which worldmaking constitutes a more satisfactory account of objects,

properties, and facts over and against competing views, viz., metaphysical realism.

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Introduction

That we play a role in cognitively making the world is an exceedingly difficult view to defend. On the face of it, the intuition that objects, properties, and facts depend on and emerge through our categorizations and conceptualizations might strike one as manifestly absurd. Surely the world is as it is independent of us. It is composed of objects, properties, and facts over which we have no control and which exist with or without us – the most we can plausibly do is name and describe those objects and discover their properties and facts. Unsurprisingly, the thesis that we make the world is a controversial one and is batted away whenever it is raised. I will focus on an approach to worldmaking which finds expression in two of its chief proponents, William James, at the beginning of the 20th century, and later by Nelson Goodman, though my focus will be almost entirely on Goodman, since contemporary criticism is aimed at his position.[1]

Briefly, James and Goodman advance a strong ontological claim – that what it is to be an object, property, or fact at all is to be carved out from the flux of experience. That is to say, there is no sense to be made, prior to our delineations, of pre-existing objects, properties, or facts. This claim has proved distasteful to many philosophers, because it seems utterly implausible to say that because we conceptualize and categorize the world in some way (with a scientific theory, for example) the world actually is the way we describe it to be. In Parts I and II of this paper I shall discuss this ontological claim and defend it against the following criticisms: (1) it is cosmologically incoherent; (2) it raises a problem of causation; (3) it implies subjectivism; (4) it commits a use-mention fallacy; and (5) it commits the problem of disagreement. In so doing, I will

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[1] See also Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

elaborate the worldmaking thesis and show, when so understood, these criticisms are not ultimately detrimental to it. In Part III I will argue that because worldmaking survives these criticisms, it should be considered as a plausible alternative to other metaphysical positions, viz., metaphysical realism.

Part I

An Explication of the Worldmaking Thesis

It is perhaps best to understand worldmaking against a metaphysical realist conception of the world. In brief, a proponent of metaphysical realism advances the notion that the world's content, that is, its properties, facts, and objects, exists readymade, external to, and independent of human cognition, conceptualization, and categorization.[2] Furthermore, a proponent of realism usually holds that objects, properties, and facts lie waiting for us to discover. Using our powers of inquiry and discovery, we extract the content from what is given in reality, rather than considering that what is given can only make sense if we give *it* content. According to this view, then, any constructivist picture of reality is fundamentally backwards – we play no role in constructing objects, properties, or facts. Instead, all we can do is uncover reality by discovering the content already embedded in it; we discover the content in reality, we play no role in constructing it.

Contra realism, the worldmaking thesis holds that we play a role in making the world through our conceptualizations and categorizations. To this effect, Goodman

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[2] Cf. Panayot Butchvarov, "Metaphysical Realism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 562-63. See also Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49-54.

states, "we make worlds by making versions."[3] The terms "construct" or "make,"

however, must be clarified. That we play a role in constructing the content of the world

does not imply that we physically construct objects out of the requisite bits of matter.[4]

The terms "make" or "construct" simply mean we help shape objects by shaping

properties, thereby conferring ontological content to the world through our cognitive

work.

Both Goodman and James contend that the human contribution to the world's

composition is impossible to ignore. An underlying principle of this position is the

notion that we cannot separate what is given in reality from how we take it to be.[5]

Goodman states, "[t]alk of unstructured content or an unconceptualized given or a

substratum without properties is self-defeating; for the talk imposes structure,

conceptualizes, ascribes properties."[6] The true or correct way in which we categorize and

conceptualize reality is the way in which reality takes on content; there are no intrinsic

properties, facts, or objects in the world. Goodman further states, "[a]s nothing is at rest

or is in motion apart from a frame of reference, so nothing is primitive or is derivationally

prior to anything apart from a constructional system"[7] and "[modes of organization] are

not 'found in the world' but *built into a world*."[8]

The argument for worldmaking can, thus, be characterized as follows. What it is

to be an object, property, or fact at all is to be delineated from the sensible flux of

experience. It follows that, prior to our delineation, reality has no content − that is, there

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[3] Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978), 94. See also Nelson Goodman, "On Starmaking," in *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrealism*, ed. Peter J. McCormick (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 144-45.
[4] Goodman, "On Starmaking," 145.
[5] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 7.
[6] Ibid., 6.
[7] Ibid., 12.
[8] Ibid., 14. Emphasis is Goodman's.

are no pre-existing or pre-conceptualized objects, properties, or facts in the world.

Metaphysical realism, as adumbrated above, is committed to pre-existing and pre-

discriminated objects, properties, and facts. Thus, realism is false and the best

explanation of reality is that we play a role in constructing it.

Worldmakers argue that there is something with which making begins – call it a

sensible flux, particles, matter, or an unstructured given. Although there is stuff with

which we begin, there is no specific *kind* of stuff – no objects, properties, or facts inhere

in it. Whichever way we conceptualize and categorize this stuff is the way in which

objects, properties, and facts emerge.[9] To elucidate this notion, it is helpful to invoke the

Quinean expression, "[t]here is no entity without identity."[10] Goodman, on this score,

writes, "[i]dentification rests upon organization into entities and kinds."[11] There is no

way to differentiate between things without cognitive making – ontology depends on

individuation. To this effect, James states, "[w]e break the flux of sensible reality into

things…We create the subjects of our true as well as of our false propositions. We create

the predicates also."[12] The world's objects (the subjects), therefore, emerge through our

constructive work by becoming individuated and differentiated. Objects become

delineated once we predicate something of them – say, some property or fact that we also

played a role in creating. Thus, objects and their facts depend on our concepts and

theories. If we do not play a role in shaping their properties and facts, objects are not

only devoid of content, but cannot properly be called objects because there is no way to

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[9] Ibid., 6. For a related discussion, see Iris Einheuser, "Toward a Conceptualist Solution of the Grounding Problem," *Noûs* 45, no. 2 (2011): 300-314. Although Einheuser's discussion and recommendations regarding the notion of "starting with something" are interesting, I will follow the Goodmanian picture, according to which we start our worldmaking process with an unstructured given.

[10] W. V. Quine, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 102.

[11] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 7-8.

[12] William James, *Pragmatism*, ed. Bruce Kuklick (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 114.

differentiate them from the rest of the flux of experience. Until the world is made in such

a way, it has no objects, properties, or facts.

Goodman provides a helpful illustration of the above notion, which is worth

quoting in full:

> I sit in a cluttered waiting room, unaware of any stereo system. Gradually
> I make out two speakers built into the bookcase, a receiver and turntable in
> a corner cabinet, and a remote control switch on the mantel. I find a
> system that was already there. But see what this finding involves:
> distinguishing the several components from the surroundings, categorizing
> them by function, and uniting them into a single whole. A good deal of
> making, with complex conceptual equipment, has gone into finding what
> is already there. Another visitor, fresh from a lifetime in the deepest
> jungle, will not find, because he has not the means of making, any stereo
> system in that room. Nor will he find books there; but in the books and
> plants I find he may find fuel and food that I do not. Not only does he not
> know that the stereo set is one; he does not recognize as a thing at all that
> which I know to be a stereo system – that is, he does not make out or make
> any such object.[13]

Goodman's illustration nicely exemplifies the foregoing, especially the claim that object-

hood depends on our conceptual work. Until our subject has delineated the space he is

presented with, there is, strictly speaking, no stereo system or any of its component parts,

just an undifferentiated sensible flux.

This illustration also makes clear the worldmaker's claim that we construct the

world with something that is already present, something we take for granted – although,

this "something" is not some specific kind of thing. Just what is this stuff we are taking

for granted? The answer is that it is context sensitive – that is, it is relative to our projects,

interests, norms, etcetera. For example, just as someone needs reed to weave a basket,

the constellation-maker needs stars and the star-maker needs the right kind of physical

matter. In each case something is being constructed, not from nothing, but instead, from

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[13] Nelson Goodman, "Notes on the Well-Made World," in *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrealism*, ed. Peter J. McCormick (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 155-56.

whatever material is appropriate for the project. The basic idea here is that there is not some one thing that everything is made of, but rather that everything is made of something.

James puts the point aptly: "[w]e receive in short the block of marble, but we carve the statue ourselves."[14] Just as a sculptor gives form to a block of marble after carving and polishing it such that it results in a sculpture, we do the same to the world. More precisely, much like the sculptor begins with a slab of marble and proceeds to carve, chip away, and construct the sculpture he has in mind in order to give it a specific form, we also begin with a slab of marble – the sensible flux of experience – and proceed to construct objects, properties, and facts via our categorizations, conceptualizations and theories – our chisels. Without the sculptor's artistic rendering, the block of marble remains just *that*, a block of marble. It would be absurd to say that the resultant sculpture was somehow pre-existent in the slab of marble, and the sculptor simply chiseled his way around it so as to make manifest this pre-existent form. Analogously, without our constructive work, the sensible flux remains a characterless sensible flux. There exist no pre-conceptualized objects, properties, or facts waiting to be discovered, but rather, we, along with the marble or sensible flux itself, help make the sculpture or world what it is.

One may object at this juncture, however, and point out that the sculpted piece of marble *was* actually in the block before the sculptor set out to work, and in this sense the composition – the object and its properties and facts – was already in the block, thus refuting the claim that independent of our constructive work, the world is devoid of content. It would seem as though we do, after all, discover the facts and properties of the world, which were already present. In an uninteresting sense this is certainly correct, the

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[14] James, Pragmatism, 112.

piece of marble that became the sculpture was contained in the marble block. However, even if it was always there, the sculptor brought it out of the block of marble; he did the constructive work, and gave the marble its shape, just as in the case of the stereo system in the waiting room Goodman describes. The question, then, is as follows: *is there any significant way in which the world is any different from the sculptor and the block of marble?* The answer, according to the worldmaker is simply, *no*.

Consider also an illustration both James and Goodman offer regarding constellations.[15] "We carve out groups of stars in the heavens," James writes, "and call them constellations, and the stars patiently suffer us to do so."[16] We locate a group of seven stars in the sky and append to them some name, say, the Big Dipper. Although this collection of stars existed as undifferentiated extraterrestrial stuff prior to our constructive work, they did not exist as the Big Dipper (i.e., as a differentiated object we call by the name 'Big Dipper') prior to our conceptual creation.[17] It is in this sense that we construct an object (i.e., the Big Dipper constellation) from the sensible flux of experience. Moreover, any star from this collection now has the property of being a star that constitutes part of the Big Dipper, while the Big Dipper, too, now has the property of being composed of seven stars. The property of being included in the Big Dipper, and the Big Dipper itself, was not inherent in the world, but rather, we made it the case by creating the constellation with the particular stars we chose. This is the way in which we make the properties of objects (that the Big Dipper has seven stars and the stars that compose the Big Dipper have the property of populating it). Finally, because we play a

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[15] Goodman, "Notes on the Well-Made World," 156.
[16] James, *Pragmatism*, 113. See also William James, *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 56.
[17] Goodman, "Notes on the Well-Made World," 156.

role in making this property of these stars, we thereby make it a fact that this star has that property. And this is the sense in which we make facts (it is a fact that those seven stars constitute the Big Dipper and that each one has the property of being part of the Big Dipper). What is true or false about statements concerning those stars – whether this or that star is or is not a Big Dipper star – is independent of us after we have done our constructive work.

But worldmakers don't stop at constellations. The stars themselves, they argue, are as much made as the constellations they populate.[18] Just as we delineate and discriminate collections of stars in the sky to shape the constellations, we also delineate and differentiate what it is to be a star from the rest of the sensible flux of experience. What constitutes star-hood does not come readymade or pre-conceptualized; there are no inherent properties that indicate to us that such-and-such is a star. Instead, we determine what constitutes star-hood (with our scientific theories, for example). Goodman contends, "we make stars by drawing certain boundaries rather than others. Nothing dictates whether the skies shall be marked off into constellations or other objects."[19] Although stars (or star stuff) existed prior to and independent of our concepts and theories as undifferentiated and unindividuated masses of physical particles in the sky, they did not exist *as* objects, or stars for that matter – they had no inherent properties that enabled us to distinguish them as distinct star-objects from other cosmic matter.[20] Thus, if it were not for our cognitive making, stars would not have the properties that make them stars, and so they would not *be* stars, ontologically speaking. Their object-hood, properties, and the facts about them depend wholly upon our conceptual making.

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

Moreover, our concepts pertaining to stars and constellations can account for their existing before we existed and carried out our constructive work.[21] When we formulate a concept regarding stars or constellations we include within that concept that they predate us. These facts and properties about stars and constellations we help construct, therefore, obtain ex post facto. Additionally, that a certain star populating the Big Dipper has more volume, shines brighter, and is farther away from Earth than the rest is true quite independent of us. Just as worldmakers can accommodate the stars predating us, they can consistently claim that a particular star has more volume, shines brighter, and is farther away from Earth than the rest. These claims are not at variance with the worldmaking thesis.

In conjunction with the above, worldmaking includes a pluralistic component. Because Goodman rejects the notion of the world as given, or as he sometimes puts it, "the way the world is,"[22] without it being one way or another, he rejects also the notion that there is an independent standard by which we can test the veridicality of our constructions or versions. To this effect, Goodman writes, versions "can be treated as our worlds."[23] Goodman partially explains what he means by there being many worlds as follows: "many different world-versions are of independent interest and importance, without any requirement or presumption of reducibility to a single base."[24] Goodman's notion that world-versions are not reducible to a "single base" is motivated by his conviction that arguments in support of such a position are "vague," have "negligible"

[21] Ibid. See also Nelson Goodman, "On Some Worldly Worries," in *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrealism*, ed. Peter J. McCormick (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 166-67.
[22] Nelson Goodman, "The Way the World Is," in *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrealism*, ed. Peter J. McCormick (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 9.
[23] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 4.
[24] Ibid.

evidence, and that the popular candidate by which reducibility might be possible, physics, is "itself fragmentary and unstable."[25]

An important motivating factor of Goodman's pluralism stems from situations in which one or more theories are contradictory, albeit adequate. The rough question raised by such situations, and addressed by Goodman, is *how can we account for situations in which two theories are true, but nevertheless, conflict*? He offers several examples to illustrate his answer, one of which involves making assertions about points and lines when our universe of discourse is "limited to a square segment of a plane, with two pairs of boundary lines labeled 'vertical' and 'horizontal.'"[26] Assuming there exist points, Goodman asks us to consider two sentences, which conflict, but are nevertheless true when asserted under the appropriate conditions:

> (14) Every point is made up of a vertical and a horizontal line
> (15) No point is made up of lines or anything else.[27]

After considering two distinct types of spaces under which we can evaluate the truth-values of these sentences – one in which lines exist exclusively, and one in which points exist exclusively, making (14) true and (15) false, and (15) true and (14) false, respectively – Goodman considers a type of space consisting of both lines and points. In this space, of course, neither (14) nor (15) is false, but it is not the case that both of them can be true at the same time.[28] Thus, Goodman concludes, if both sentences are true, then they must be true in distinct "realms," because they cannot both be true in one realm.[29] Ultimately, Goodman concludes versions are like the two sentences above in that "their

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[25] Ibid., 4-5.
[26] Ibid., 114.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 115.
[29] Ibid.

realms are thus less aptly regarded as within one world than as two different worlds, and even…as worlds in conflict."[30]

Goodman's pluralism, then, contains the idea that we can have contradictory theories or versions, both of which are satisfactory so long as the theories are not embedded in or constructing one and the same world. If they were both constructing the same world, then, of course, the Law of Non-Contradiction would be violated, and one or both of the theories would have to be jettisoned. Thus, we use different universes of discourse, which are tantamount to different worlds, so that the contradictory versions are not conjoined within the same world or universe of discourse. Therefore, the Law of Non-Contradiction is not violated, and we can maintain two incompatible theories at the same time, they are merely in reference to two distinct worlds.

Consider the following broader elucidation than the ones Goodman offers. If Protagoras occupies the perspective of Version-Δ, and according to Version-Δ, P is true, then he can consistently assert that P in this world, call it "World-Δ." On the other hand, if Protagoras occupies the perspective of Version-Σ, and according to Version-Σ, not-P is true, then he can consistently assert that not-P in this world, call it "World-Σ." If Version-Δ and Version-Σ – and accordingly, World-Δ and World-Σ – overlap, then Protagoras cannot consistently claim that P, because this would violate the Law of Non-Contradiction. However, this is not an issue for the worldmaking thesis. Pluralism can thrive under this position, because, as the Goodmanian slogan goes, "we make worlds by making versions."[31] He goes on to write, "[t]he multiple worlds I countenance are just

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[30] Ibid., 116.
[31] Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 94.

the actual worlds made by and answering to true or right versions."[32] Each version is a

different, distinct world, and so, as long as Protagoras occupies one world or the other he

will not contradict himself when asserting either that P or that not-P, respectively.

What fundamentally characterizes worldmaking, then, is the claim that we

construct objects, properties, and facts with the use of our cognitive powers, and

moreover, distinct world-versions make distinct worlds, giving the position a pluralistic

flavor. The notion that the world consists of pre-conceptualized objects, properties, and

facts awaiting our discovery is misguided. James nicely articulates this by denying "the

belief that there is an 'eternal' edition of [the world] ready-made and complete'" and

advancing the position that "the world is still in the process of making."[33] The

implication of such a position is that reality's composition and character depends on our

categorization and conceptualization.[34] The position is characterized, also, by its

pluralistic component. Incompatible world-versions do not conflict with one another

because each version is a separate world. Thus, satisfactory, yet contradictory world-

versions are not susceptible of violating the Law of Non-Contradiction.

Part II

Criticisms and Responses

The Cosmological Objection

From nothing, nothing comes. This much the worldmaker will concede.

Worldmaking is committed to starting its construction of the world from somewhere – be

it the sensible flux of experience or unstructured given – and it is this commitment that

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[32] Ibid.

[33] William James, "The Absolute and the Strenuous Life," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* 4, no. 20 (Sep., 1907): 547.

[34] Ibid. Cf. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 132.

critics tend to attack. Paul Boghossian, for instance, argues that since worldmakers must be committed to a basic starting point in order to get construction off the ground, worldmaking is incoherent. If there is something upon which construction can do its work, then that seems to imply that there is a readymade world, that there are some basic, intrinsic facts and properties beyond our reach, independent of our construction.[35] Boghossian argues, "it must be assumed that there are some basic facts – the basic worldly dough – on which our redescriptive strategies can get to work. But that is precisely what fact-constructivism denies."[36] In like fashion, John Searle argues that the worldmaker effectively "presupposes realism, because it presupposes a language-independent reality that can be carved up or divided up in different ways."[37] Searle shares Boghossian's conclusion, maintaining that the worldmaker must be committed to a readymade reality independent of our constructive work – one that contains some basic fact or facts – because if no such reality exists, worldmaking cannot begin. But the worldmaker denies this. Thus, worldmaking is both committed to and not committed to there being some basic facts independent of our making.

Response to the Cosmological Objection

Although worldmaking is committed to some starting point from which construction begins, this commitment does not imply the incoherency Boghossian and Searle believe it does. It is true that worldmaking must start with something, but it is not

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[35] Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 35-38.

[36] Ibid., 37-38.

[37] John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 165. It may seem odd to present Searle as an enemy of constructivism when he is a constructivist in another sense – that we construct social facts. What's relevant here is that he recognizes constructivism in some cases (the social facts case, in particular), but in other cases he doesn't (Derrida's deconstructionism and Goodman's worldmaking, for example) – he doesn't believe the physical world is constructed the way worldmakers do.

some particular, determinate thing that we start with. It does not follow that this basic

stuff upon which making commences has inherent in it some primitive facts and

properties that are required for making. Consider a space filled with particles, atoms,

matter, a sensible flux, or whatever. Call this the basic stuff with which worldmaking can

begin. There are, then, multiple ways we can start the worldmaking process – that is, we

have options. We can organize the stuff we choose – say, we choose some particles,

bearing in mind that we could have started with atoms or matter or something else – in

myriad ways depending on and according to our interests, projects, and needs. This is the

way in which worldmaking does its work; we categorize and differentiate whichever stuff

we choose to work with and thereby begin making the world. As mentioned above, the

basket weaver needs reed to weave a basket, the constellation-maker needs stars and the

star-maker needs whatever physical matter is deemed appropriate for making stars.

The upshot of these considerations is twofold. First, it shows that Boghossian and

Searle mischaracterize worldmaking. While making starts with something, there is no

one unique starting point, "no ontologically privileged basis"[38] like the "basic worldly

dough." Depending on our projects and needs, we may start with different bases. Second,

the space filled with basic stuff did not come with some pre-established organization.

There was no given ontology, no basic facts or properties inherent in this space; what was

given, in other words, was completely ontologically unstructured. Facts and properties

only emerged after we categorized the stuff into different groupings depending on our

practical interests. The same goes for the world. It makes no sense to talk about the

world's ontology as it is given, because such an enterprise is unachievable. As

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[38] Iris Einheuser, "Fear of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Review* 117, no. 3 (2008): 453. See also
Goodman *Ways of Worldmaking*, 6.

mentioned above, such talk is self-defeating – we cannot talk about the given without

taking it *to be* someway. The "basic worldly dough" to which Boghossian refers is not a

basic fact – it is not a fact in any sense. It is, of course, yet another option for our starting

point for making, but that it is an optional starting point does not imply that it contains or

is a basic fact. Again, there is no *single* unique basis from which making commences.

Thus, Boghossian and Searle mischaracterize the position, and as a result, miss their

target. Moreover, worldmaking is not committed to there being pre-conceptualized facts

independent of our making, and accordingly, is not rendered incoherent by the

cosmological objection.

A Problem of Causation

As we have seen, worldmakers maintain that objects, properties, and facts depend

on our conceptual making. But critics argue that this position is susceptible to an obvious

counterexample: what of objects, properties, and facts that pre-exist humans? Surely, they

argue, it cannot be the case that mountains and stars were constructed by our cognitive

making.[39] It was and is a fact that mountains and stars existed before humans could

construct such a fact or those objects themselves.[40] Boghossian asserts, "it's a truism

about most of the objects and facts that we talk about…that their existence *antedates*

ours," and subsequently asks, "[how], then, could their existence depend on us?"[41] He

labels this the "problem of causation," because, he argues, "[this view] commits us to a

bizarre form of backwards causation, where the cause (our activity) comes later than its

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[39] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 26.
[40] Cf. Einheuser, "Fear of Knowledge," 452.
[41] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 38. See also Israel Scheffler, "The Wonderful Worlds of Goodman," in *Starmaking: Realism, Anti-Realism, and Irrealism*, ed. Peter J. McCormick (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 138-39.

effect (the existence of the dinosaurs)."[42] Thus, critics argue, worldmaking offends our commonsense intuition that certain objects, their properties, and facts existed before we did. It seems worldmaking would have to commit itself to "a bizarre form of backwards causation" in order for its view of objects and facts to be coherent.

Response to the Problem of Causation

The problem of causation, although intuitively attractive, is based upon a misunderstanding of worldmaking. Worldmakers maintain that we can include in our concepts facts and objects that existed before us. Goodman notes, "if stars like constellations are made by versions, how can the stars have been there eons before all versions? Plainly, through being made by a version that puts the stars much earlier than itself in its own time-space."[43] Once we have made it the case that some particular undifferentiated and unindividuated mass of extraterrestrial stuff constitutes star-hood via our concepts or theories, it is consistent for the worldmaker to claim that stars pre-existed us and would have existed without us as long as this temporal claim is included in the concept or theory. Thus, while it seems troubling to say that we make objects that existed before us, all this means is that after we have completed our constructive work, objects like stars and the facts and properties they have, as mentioned above, obtain ex post facto. Worldmakers can, therefore, consistently claim without any "bizarre form of backwards causation" that stars and other like objects existed before us and would have existed without us – though not as inherent in a readymade world – and because this is the case, worldmaking avoids the problem of causation.

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[42] Ibid. See also Michael Devitt, "Worldmaking Made Hard: Rejecting Global Response Dependency," *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (2006): 5; 11.
[43] Goodman, "Notes on the Well-Made World," 156.

Worldmaking Implies Subjectivism

Critics also raise the concern that worldmaking leads to subjectivism about truth, and implies an "anything goes" mentality. We can imagine, they argue, that it is within the bounds of worldmaking that humans can make of the world what they will – its character and qualities are subject to our arbitrary whims and fancies.[44] If we make objects, properties, and facts, then we run the risk of engendering radically relativistic, counterintuitive ontologies containing no objective truth or facts of the matter. But if this is the case, critics argue, then truth is completely dependent upon us, and worldmaking implies subjectivism.

Response to the Objection that Worldmaking Implies Subjectivism

Although it may seem that worldmaking implies subjectivism, the thesis does not allow for arbitrarily "making up" properties, facts, or objects at will, nor does it push objective truth by the wayside.[45] There are constraints on the view which erase this danger. For instance, any arbitrarily "made up" accounts of reality would eventually be eliminated and replaced by accounts that better accord with our purposes and practices in the world – those which enable us to act more proficiently and with better assurance. Plus, we must constrain making with the norms of inquiry currently in place – for example, our background beliefs and best available scientific theories. Goodman explains that although truth "cannot be defined or tested by agreement with 'the world,'" worldmakers can nevertheless advance a definition of truth.[46] "A version is taken to be true," Goodman writes, "when it offends no unyielding beliefs and none of its own

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[44] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 158-59. See also Devitt, "Worldmaking Made Hard," 11.
[45] Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 94.
[46] Ibid., 17.

precepts."[47] What Goodman means by "unyielding beliefs," among other things, are the

"laws of logic" and our perennial beliefs, norms, and practices.[48] "Precepts" include

whatever frame of reference we choose to regulate our construction with.[49] Thus, if a

world-version is to be posited, it must not only accord with the current norms of inquiry,

but it must also conform to long-standing beliefs and practices which influence our

construction of worlds. The version, accordingly, must not conflict with the resistance

provided by these current, and historical, norms. This is enough to prevent

unconstrained, arbitrary constructions of worlds.

A decidedly pragmatic constraint on worldmaking includes the requirement that

whatever we construct must be useful for navigating the world more effectively.[50] Our

constructions can be useful, for example, insofar as they help us predict and explain

events. If we are to judge one construction of the world better than another for the

purpose of eliminating wildly implausible constructions, then we look to the usefulness

of each construction.[51] Whichever version is more useful – for example, in helping us to

predict and explain events from the perspective of the norms of practice, inquiry, and/or

science at a particular point in time – than another in certain situations and contexts is the

better, or more successful, of the two versions.

Another constraint concerns our sensory experience and the background beliefs

we bring to our inquiries and constructions. James writes, "[w]oe to him whose beliefs

play fast and loose with the order which realities follow in his experience; they will lead

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] James, *Pragmatism*, 114; see also 93-94; 97-101.
[51] Ibid., 115.

him nowhere or else make false connexions."[52] The "realities" to which James refers in this passage are, among other things, our sensory experience, background beliefs, and current norms of inquiry. We must comply with this experience, else our constructions will result in incongruity and inappropriateness. Thus, James notes, "[w]e plunge forward into the field of fresh experience with the beliefs our ancestors and we have made already; these determine what we notice; what we notice determines what we do; what we do again determines what we experience."[53] Our construction of the world's ontology is, therefore, restricted by the background beliefs we bring along with ourselves – we are constrained by and build upon what we already have. These constraints together prevent our constructions from being completely arbitrary.

Finally, consider again the constellation illustration set forth above. After we have made the Big Dipper by grouping seven stars, the facts about the Big Dipper and the stars that compose it are as much independent of us as they are dependent on us. The facts are dependent on us insofar as we make it a fact that these seven stars each have the property of being included in the Big Dipper and that they constitute the Big Dipper. The facts are independent of us insofar as after we have made the constellation, propositions about the Big Dipper can have a truth-value – for example, it can be true or false that the Big Dipper has n stars and whether some stars are or are not stars that populate the Big Dipper. These facts or truths, once constructed, depend on the constellation itself. There is no subjectivity about truth here; it is as objective as it gets. Thus, worldmaking does not imply subjectivism.

Worldmaking is Committed to a Use-Mention Fallacy

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[52] Ibid., 94.
[53] Ibid., 114-115.

Michael Devitt contends that worldmakers commit a use-mention fallacy.[54] He argues that proponents of worldmaking blur "the crucial distinction between theories of the world and the world itself."[55] He illustrates this as follows: the creation of the word 'rose' brought with it a "condition of reference: (1) 'rose' refers…to something in virtue of its being *R* (where…'*R*' expresses whatever *property* something must have to be referred to by 'rose')."[56] The crucial move in this argument comes in where "[t]he meaning of 'rose' *does not alone determine*, for example, that (2) 'rose' refers to *b*. To establish (2), we need not only (1) but also (3) *b* is *R*. And (3) is something that is right outside our control."[57] Thus, for something (*b* in this case) to be referred to by the expression 'rose', it (*b*) must also be *R*, where *R* denotes "whatever property something must have to be referred to by 'rose': "*Something has to be a rose to be referred to by 'rose'.*"[58] But, Devitt notes, something being a 'rose' is neither shaped nor determined by our power of reference or description, it is instead determined by a property already existing in reality.

Devitt argues that we have no power to construct the properties of *b* such that it satisfies the conditions requisite for being referred to by the expression 'rose'. The most that is within our power is being able to use the word 'rose' to refer to something that is *R*. Thus, Devitt concludes, because rose-hood is controlled by reality, and not human construction, worldmaking is untenable, because the position is committed to a confusion between using words to refer to objects with the notion that we take part in making the

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[54] Cf. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 166.
[55] Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 241. See also Devitt, "Worldmaking Made Hard" and *Putting Metaphysics First: Essays on Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[56] Ibid., 242; my emphasis.
[57] Ibid., 242-43; my emphasis.
[58] Ibid., 244.

properties of those objects, and the objects themselves, such that the word can refer to

them. This relation simply does not hold, Devitt says, and because this is the case,

worldmaking is deeply misguided.

Devitt provides a playful supplementary discussion of this argument, which

clarifies its major claims:

> Consider one of the kinds that we have so far overlooked: the kind of
> object that strains the credulity of tourists from Peoria. Let us introduce a
> name for this kind of object: 'peorincred'. Now, *as a matter of fact*,
> echidnas are peorincreds. *But our linguistic decision did not make them
> so*: *they always were peorincreds, and would have been even if people had
> never introduced the word 'peorincred' or any other word. Peorincreds
> are part of the ready-made world*.[59]

Devitt furthermore notes that constructivists confuse the freedom of reference with "one

we do not have: the freedom to choose which kinds objects are members of. We can

choose to name stones and not peorincreds, but we cannot choose whether something is a

stone or a peorincred."[60] He claims that we simply do not have the constructive power to

create the properties objects have, properties are inherent in objects already. What we

can do is discover those properties and, subsequently, have the ability to utter correct

referential propositions between a word and the property an individual must have in order

to be referred to by that word. Worldmaking's crucial tenet is, according to Devitt,

simply false.

Searle further illustrates this criticism when he writes, "[f]rom the fact that our

knowledge/conception/picture of reality is constructed by human brains in human

interactions, it does not follow that the *reality* of which we have the

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[59] Ibid., 245; my emphasis.
[60] Ibid.

knowledge/conception/picture is constructed by human brains in human interactions."[61]

Searle notes that this is a non sequitur, and indeed it is, as the conclusion simply does not follow from the premise. Israel Scheffler shares Searle's conviction. He notes that from the premise that reality cannot be understood nor made sense of apart from human cognition it does not follow that reality is thereby made by human cognition.[62] The pith of his criticism is that our words and concepts make neither the world nor its objects, properties, and facts. Thus, Searle and Scheffler argue that even if it is the case that human cognition plays a role in constructing how we take reality to be, it does not necessarily follow that reality is *actually* constructed by human cognition.

Searle further argues that worldmakers fail to recognize that reality "does not care how we describe it and it remains the same under the various different descriptions we give of it."[63] He considers a thought experiment in which we imagine some portion of the world described by humans. He then asks us to imagine that humans become extinct. What, then, happens to the objects and facts in this portion of the world? Searle's answer is, "[a]bsolutely nothing. Different descriptions of facts, objects, etc., came and went, but the facts, objects, etc., remained unaffected."[64] Searle's point is that objects and facts exist even if our descriptions of those objects and facts never existed. A more crucial point is Searle's argument that there is a distinction to be made between facts and objects and descriptions of those facts and objects. The former, Searle says, are completely independent of our cognitive work, while the latter are dependent upon us, but do nothing to delimit, and thereby construct, the facts and objects of the world.

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[61] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 159.
[62] Israel Scheffler "The Wonderful Worlds of Goodman," 140.
[63] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 163.
[64] Ibid.,164.

Response to the Charge of a Use-Mention Fallacy

What is unsatisfactory about this criticism is that its proponents, especially Devitt, have a tendency to presuppose realism in their argument against worldmaking. This results in begging the question against the worldmaker. For the criticism to be successful, it needs to work from within the position, or at the very least appreciate it to some degree. The worldmaker only commits the use-mention fallacy if he presupposes a realist position about properties and objects. But this is precisely what the worldmaker does not do. Devitt's critique, for instance, amounts to arguing that constructivism is wrong, because the realism Devitt holds is correct.

But there is a charitable way to present Devitt's criticism such that it does not presuppose realism and would thus be more germane to the task of demonstrating the alleged errors of worldmaking. Consider a scenario in which we take away our perspective and it seems some fact still exists[65] – for example, that such-and-such mushroom has the property of being noxious to humans. This particular mushroom is going to be noxious no matter how we construct the world. There will always be something "out there" that despite our constructive role in the world, it will be the case – it is a fact no matter the perspective. In the spirit of Devitt, then, however we conceptualize it, this world still stays the same in some way – it does not follow that our conceptualization brings about a fact. There is some bit of stuff that does the same thing – it is a fact that this mushroom has the property of being noxious to human beings. But if this is the case, then there is a property and a fact about that property pre-construction and even post-construction, because it remains the same under each description of the

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[65] Cf. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 163-64.

world. And so the world is in this sense readymade, and the worldmaker has some explaining to do.

The worldmaker can respond by claiming that this mushroom's property of being noxious only emerges out of a conceptual framework. The objection ignores that there cannot be concept-transcendent properties of things. The mushroom can only have the property of being noxious after we have categorized it along with other noxious things – and all that after we have delineated the criteria for object-hood. It is a mistake to say the mushroom had that property inherently, and we picked it out. Of course, just as with the case concerning stars explained above, once we have come up with the concept of noxiousness through our cognitive work, we can coherently include in that concept that the mushroom was always noxious regardless of our existence. But for the mushroom to be noxious in the first place requires our cognitive making and organization. Accordingly, that "*b* is *R*," in Devitt's example above, makes no sense without delineating what counts as "*R*," and *b* for that matter, in the first place. Without doing so, no reference can even occur. Devitt has his picture of the world backwards and simply misses the point in his criticism of worldmaking.

What goes for my response to Devitt goes for the non sequitur Searle and Scheffler pin on worldmaking's principal claim. As I argued above, there is no sense to be made of predetermined objects, properties, and facts. Having access to a readymade ontology is impossible without first having delineated the boundaries of objects, and their properties and facts. If the world is to have any characteristics at all, then from the notion that we play a role in making the world, we must allow that it does *indeed* follow that we

construct the world. Worldmaking, therefore, avoids the problems posed by both the use-mention fallacy and the alleged non sequitur.

Worldmaking is Committed to the Problem of Disagreement

Boghossian, in addition to his criticisms set forth above, raises the problem of disagreement, which is aimed at worldmaking's pluralistic component. He argues that worldmaking succumbs to a contradiction, and thereby fails to comply with the Law of Non-Contradiction – it is impossible both that P and that not-P.[66] Boghossian arrives at this assessment by arguing that because the constructivist position includes the principle that our construction of the world depends on our particular projects and interests, it is possible that we construct contradictory ontologies. To illustrate his argument, Boghossian asks his reader to consider a scenario in which Society-Δ constructs a state of affairs such that P obtains. Society-Σ, on the other hand, constructs a state of affairs such that not-P obtains.[67] He then argues as follows:

1. Since we have constructed the fact that P, P.
2. And since it is possible that another community should have constructed the facts that not-P, then possibly not-P.
3. So: It is possible that both P and not-P.[68]

But, by the Law of Non-Contradiction, it is impossible for P and not-P to obtain. Therefore, because this is the case, Boghossian argues constructivist theses like worldmaking must be able to account for such incompatibilities. But, he further notes that this is a problem to which worldmaking has no answer. The objection, according to Boghossian, is "decisive."[69]

Response to the Problem of Disagreement

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[66] Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 40.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 41.

Although worldmaking permits conflicting, yet true sentences or versions, it does not, however, violate the Law of Non-Contradiction, as Boghossian argues. As put forth in the foregoing, Goodman argues that contradictory sentences or versions that are alternatively true cannot, nevertheless, both be true in the same world. Thus, because we make worlds by making versions, the contradictory versions are embedded, respectively, in distinct worlds. But if each version is in a distinct world, it follows trivially that they are not in the same world. Therefore, both statements or versions cannot be asserted or maintained at the same time, and so, the Law of Non-Contradiction is upheld.

Consider, just as Boghossian does, two societies which construct incompatible world-versions. Let us call them what we named them above, Society-Δ and Society-Σ. Boghossian considers a situation in which Society-Δ and Society-Σ construct contradictory world-versions; Society-Δ constructs a state of affairs such that P obtains and Society-Σ constructs a state of affairs such that not-P obtains. He is certainly correct that when conjoined, these world-versions violate the Law of Non-Contradiction. He is wrong, however, in claiming worldmaking cannot account for such a scenario. The incompatible world-versions are true of distinct worlds, the worldmaker would argue, not one and the same world. Thus, there is no danger of breaching the Law of Non-Contradiction.

Ultimately, then, the inadequacy of Boghossian's criticism is located in his interpretation of worldmaking's pluralistic component. His misunderstanding[70] of the position leads him to argue that different societies positing contradictory theories or world-versions are operating in the same universe of discourse or the same world. That being the case, he draws the conclusion that worldmaking violates a fundamental law of

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[70] Cf. Einheuser, "Fear of Knowledge," 453.

logic. But, as I have argued, this is not the worldmaker's position. Worldmaking does not violate the Law of Non-Contradiction, because of the particular brand of pluralism built into the position. Moreover, because worldmaking can account for the incompatibilities Boghossian advances against it, it is therefore not susceptible to his criticism.

Part III

On balance, I find the criticisms advanced against worldmaking unconvincing and unsatisfactory. As I have shown, criticisms of the position either miss their target entirely or fail to undermine the position successfully. Because this is the case, worldmaking stands as a plausible position. And although it may run contrary to most philosophers' and even non-philosophers' intuitions about the way the world is, I believe my efforts above should persuade opponents to consider worldmaking more seriously as a credible and viable alternative to competing views on the nature of objects, properties, and facts. Thus, I shall hereafter argue in support of worldmaking against one of its most diehard competitors, metaphysical realism.[71] I will proceed by offering an overview of metaphysical realism. Thereafter, I shall raise three issues covering (1) objects, (2) properties, and (3) satisfactory, yet contradictory theories, all of which will show that where metaphysical realism proves inadequate, worldmaking prevails as a more satisfactory, and plausible, position.

A Compendious Overview of Metaphysical Realism

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[71] There are, of course, other metaphysical positions to which worldmaking is opposed, and in varying degrees – Scheffler's "pluralism," for example (See Israel Scheffler, "A Plea for Plurealism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* XXXV, no. 3 (1999): 425-436). My decision to focus on metaphysical realism is motivated by the fact that it is the position against which worldmaking is most adamantly opposed.

In the aforementioned I adumbrated the metaphysical realist's position, but I now wish to focus on a particular articulation of metaphysical realism[72] expressed by Putnam, and an argument Devitt sets forth in support of the position. First, Putnam's characterization of realism is as follows:

> On this perspective, the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world' is. Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things…its favorite point of view is a God's Eye point of view.[73]

Putnam's description is not, of course, the sole way of representing realism, but it serves to provide us with a general flavor of the position's major tenets. The world's ontology, according to realism, does not depend at all on our cognitive powers, much less our existence. Objects, properties, and relations obtaining between objects all exist independently of how we conceptualize and categorize the world. Stars, mountains, trees, rocks, etcetera, and the properties constitutive of their being the objects they are exist readymade. The most we can do with regard to these objects is discover their inherent properties and figure out which of them is essential to, and thereby constitutive of, their being objects of a particular kind. Objects are as they are no matter what we think about them.

Staunch proponent of realism and familiar opponent to worldmaking, Michael Devitt, advances an argument in support of the realist position predicated upon what he calls commonsense, and the notion that objects exist even when we are not there to perceive them.[74] Devitt's argument is worth quoting in full, and is as follows:

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[72] Hereafter simply "realism."
[73] Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, 49.
[74] Cf. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 164.

> From an early age we come to believe that such objects as stones, cats, and trees exist. Furthermore, we believe that these objects exist even when we are not perceiving them, and that they do not depend for their existence on our opinions nor on anything mental. This Realism about ordinary objects is confirmed day by day in our experience. It is…the very core of common sense. Given this strong case for Realism, we should give it up only in the face of powerful arguments against it and for an alternative. There are no such arguments. That concludes the case for Realism.[75]

Initially, I take issue with Devitt's conviction that from the idea that commonsense tells us objects exist independently of us, it does not necessarily follow that they do in fact exist independently of us. I shall argue for this more thoroughly in what follows, but I would like to take note that commonsense, or day-by-day experience, is not a particularly strong principle to abide by. Commonsense tells us that we ought not to eat food that has fallen on a dirty floor, because it could be inimical to our health. However, it does not follow with necessity that eating dirty-floor-food will make us sick if ingested – we may get lucky, much to our mothers' dismay. Analogously, because commonsense tells us objects like stones, cats, and trees exist independently of us whether we perceive them or not, it does not follow that it is the case that objects are not dependent upon our cognition.

My task henceforth is to show Devitt, and the reader, that there are convincing arguments against realism, which should influence us to reconsider its plausibility. Moreover, I shall fulfill Devitt's second request, the demand for an alternative, by arguing that worldmaking stands as a viable alternative to realism. To these arguments I shall now turn.

A Problem Regarding Object Differentiation

[75] Devitt, "Worldmaking Made Hard: Rejecting Global Response Dependency," 3. Cf. Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 60.

As discussed in the explication above, worldmakers maintain that object-hood depends upon our cognitive constructions. Of course, worldmakers are not merely speaking of objects like artifacts – for example, tables and chairs. These are trivial, uncontroversial cases in which we are clearly making the objects under consideration. On the contrary, the idea is that until we differentiate, say, stars from other celestial stuff using whatever principle of individuation we find appropriate to the task, there are, strictly speaking, no objects called 'stars'.

Now, when realism is pitted against worldmaking it may be argued that either (1) objects exist independently of us or (2) their existence depends on us. If we consider the first disjunct true, then realism is vindicated. No matter how much we think we are carving up the world through our categorizations and conceptualizations, we are simply misled if we think the world takes on the character we impose on it through these processes. Objects in the world are not a product of our cognitive making, but instead, they merely exist for us to discover and make sense of.

To reiterate Searle's and Scheffler's point, that the world is *actually* constructed via our concepts is not a necessary consequence of the fact that we use concepts to understand or make rational sense of the world. Take humans out of the picture, and the world's objects – say, its rocks and trees – remain actually distinct objects. Thus, one might object that the worldmaker has put the cart before the horse. That we are able to determine object-hood for something does not depend on our conceptual making, but instead, object-hood is a characteristic of something because it comes to us pre-delineated and pre-conceptualized. We are able to differentiate between a rock and a tree not because we have conceptualized and categorized these objects from the sensible flux of

experience, but rather, because the rock and the tree, independently of our doings, are simply distinct entities – these objects are readymade. Thus, objects are not dependent on human cognitive making for their existence.

Although realism has strong intuitive or commonsensical appeal for most philosophers and non-philosophers alike, it is, I think, deceptively convincing. Positing that objects exist independently of us because, as Searle argues, if we imagine humans becoming extinct, then objects will remain, does not necessarily entail that objects do in fact exist independently of us. The force and significance of Searle's thought experiment is not so much that if we were to become extinct tomorrow, then objects would continue existing. I think this is best understood as a rhetorical flourish intended to persuade the careless reader. Instead, I take Searle to suggest that if we did not exist *at all*, objects would still exist.

If we read Searle as I just suggested, and ignore his rhetorical flourish, then his argument becomes a bit suspicious. It is a mistake to consider object-hood independently of human cognition, because if we were not to exist at all, then there is no sense in which objects exist, either. It can be admitted that an unspecified, characterless stuff exists independently of us, but until we carve it up by delineating certain boundaries, and thereby differentiate this "stuff," there are properly speaking no objects. For instance, picking out stars in the firmament requires that we first have the relevant concepts which constitute star-hood and the appropriate categories to put them in – say, large bright celestial objects. Once again, as Quine teaches us, "[t]here is no entity without identity."[76] Thus, there may be a sensible flux of experience, a characterless reality consisting of no objects, independent of our cognitive making, but this is most certainly

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[76] Quine, *Theories and Things*, 102.

not the reality envisaged by the realist. Indeed, it is bleak and bland. Objects simply do not exist without our first demarcating the sensible flux. The first disjunct is, therefore, false – objects do not exist independently of humans. Accordingly, it follows that objects depend upon us for their existence.

Worldmaking, therefore, better explains how we can make rational sense of objects and what is constitutive of object-hood than realism, because realism does not provide us with adequate tools to distinguish between objects when we are first confronted with the world. It simply makes no sense to designate something with the name 'object' until we have the proper concepts and categories in place. Object-hood, consequently, depends on conceptualization. Because realism does not account for this, worldmaking takes primacy over and against realism with regard to making sense of how objects come into existence.

A Problem Regarding Properties

Worldmakers are committed to the idea that we play a role in making the properties objects have. For instance, when we are trying to distinguish between a star and other celestial matter, we shape the properties by which star-hood is determined, as Goodman writes, "drawing certain boundaries rather than others."[77] There are no readymade, inherent properties essential to star-hood in reality, which are discovered by humans, giving us the appropriate signifiers by which we can recognize stars. The same goes for our more familiar terrestrial objects like trees or flowers.

Realists, on the other hand, believe that the properties constitutive of object-hood *do* exist readymade. Such properties do not depend on us for their existence. Rather, we

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[77] Goodman, "Notes on the Well-Made World," 156.

are merely capable of discovering what they are. It will be helpful to reconsider some of Devitt's illustrations from his argument against worldmaking, as he takes them, also, to support realism.

In particular, I want to focus on his argument regarding roses and the property they must have in order to be denoted by the expression 'rose'. To reiterate, here is Devitt's argument: "(1) 'rose' refers…to something in virtue of its being R (where…'R' expresses whatever property something must have to be referred to by 'rose')…The meaning of 'rose' does not alone determine, for example, that (2) 'rose' refers to b. To establish (2), we need not only (1) but also (3) b is R. And (3) is something that is right outside our control."[78] That b is R, according to Devitt, is controlled and decided by the world, not by human cognition. We must discover whether b is R in order to successfully refer to b with the expression 'rose'. Devitt takes it that any view to the contrary is simply false.

What Devitt and other proponents of realism fail to recognize is that there is no sense to be made of pairing expressions to objects without first determining what counts as a particular object in the first place. For instance, borrowing Devitt's example, that b is R must first be established by whatever concept is relevant and appropriate to the task. That b is R, in other words, falls under the purview of human conceptualization, and does not come in the world readymade. If it does not fall under our purview, then we would merely attend to the object, since b would be devoid of any character – that is, properties – indicating to us what kind of object it is; we must, in other words, determine its character in order for reference to occur, much less be successful.

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[78] Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 242-43.

Consider a further example. That *x* is an object referred to by the expression 'hard' is determined by our placing it in the relevant kind 'hardness'. But the kind 'hardness' does not exist readymade in the world. Saying that it does would be akin to saying the predicate 'is Mrs. Jones's dog' in the sentence 'Rufus is Mrs. Jones's dog' exists readymade in the world. We create the kind 'hardness' through conceptualization. And once this is established, we can then further determine which entities are appropriately grouped under it. This is the way in which we decide what counts as having the property *hardness*. And until this occurs, *x* does not have the property of being hard. Thus, referring to *x* as being hard, as well as *x* having the property hardness, depends on our conceptualization and categorization.

Although I believe Devitt is correct in asserting that the expression 'rose' cannot by itself establish that 'rose' refers to some object, he is wrong to think that the property *R* is outside our control. Quite the contrary, we determine the reference relation (that 'rose' refers to an object that is *R*), that *b* is *R*, and, accordingly, that 'rose' refers to *b*. Realism cannot satisfactorily account for such cases, while worldmaking can. Thus, worldmaking stands as a more satisfactory, and plausible, alternative to realism with regard to positing an adequate account of properties.

Accounting For Satisfactory, Yet Contradictory Theories

We often encounter contradictory theories and ontologies – for example, the world as flat and the world as round, and Euclidean geometry and non-Euclidean geometry. Realists, as I have characterized them, believe that such attempts at making sense of the world are attempts at describing it veridically or discovering facts inherent in it. Thus, although realists could allow for incompatible versions or descriptions of the

world[79], they nonetheless remain in conflict since they refer to one and the same world. Conversely, worldmaking can allow for incompatible world-versions that do not conflict in one and the same world since each world-version can be taken as a distinct world. Thus, it is not the versions that are in conflict *per se*, but rather, as Goodman puts the point, it is worlds that are in conflict.

Consider a situation in which two equally satisfactory theories or world-versions are incompatible with each other. Further suppose both have the same predictive power and equal degrees of satisfactoriness when it comes to their explanatory power, but they both do so in divergent, incompatible ways. Under one conception of realism, analogous to Putnam's description above, one theory must be eliminated. There seems to be no harm done in this scenario, as both theories are satisfactory. However, the elimination is liable to create controversy, generating not only a conflict of theories but also a conflict of personalities.

Under a slightly modified realism, one which allows for relativism, both theories may remain in tact. But this allows for incompatibility within the same world. If we think of the world and everything it contains as our universe of discourse, then we are allowing for incompatibility within our universe of discourse, which is an unacceptable consequence. Thus, even if realists allow for relativism, contradictory theories still conflict within the same universe of discourse. The advantage of worldmaking, on the other hand, lies in its principle that contradictory theories are best understood as falling under the scope of distinct universes of discourse – that is, distinct worlds, as different world-versions constitute distinct worlds. Worldmaking, therefore, better accounts for incompatible theories and world-versions, both of which are nonetheless satisfactory or

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[79] See Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 155.

true, and realism simply cannot do this in virtue of its principles. Thus, again, we see that worldmaking constitutes a viable and more attractive position over and against realism.

Conclusion

I believe I have accomplished at least two feats in the foregoing. The first of which concerns my defense of worldmaking. As I have argued already, I think the arguments leveled against worldmaking miss their mark either by failing to show the position to be implausible or by misunderstanding it entirely. Second, because I have demonstrated that worldmaking does not fall prey to the above criticisms, I then showed that it should be regarded as a plausible metaphysical position among its competitors, namely, metaphysical realism. Worldmaking provides a better account of the world than realism, and because this is the case, stands as a viable alternative to realism. The position is, therefore, not a silly one, but rather, a plausible way in which we can make rational sense of the world and our place in it.

As a result, I believe my attempts should influence philosophers to take the worldmaker more seriously, and to consider the ways in which worldmaking stands as a tenable position and an alternative to so-called intuitive metaphysical perspectives like realism. A recent commentator and contributor to the polemic concerning worldmaking, Iris Einheuser, writes,

> The facts are what they are and we do our best to discover them, some of us with more, some with less success. Departure from this commonsense picture requires both a strong motivation that stems from reflection on the nature of the facts in question…*and* a detailed enough account of how these facts are supposed to be socially constructed. The right to a constructivist position has to be earned and I expect that once they have been shown just how hard it is to formulate a coherent, let alone plausible, version…many people will retreat to modesty.[80]

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[80] Einheuser, "Fear of Knowledge," 455.

I hope I have convinced the reader to some degree *not* to retreat to modesty, but instead, that there is good reason to forge ahead. Einheuser's observation is certainly a perspicacious one insofar as the task will not be easy. However, I believe I have shown herein that worldmaking stands up in the face of criticism and on that score it should be treated not only as a plausible position on its own, but as a reasonable and serious alternative to realism.

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