

## RESSENYES

SHOTTENKIRK, Dena (2009)

*Nominalism and Its Aftermath: The Philosophy of Nelson Goodman*  
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### Nominalism Unscathed

Nelson Goodman is widely considered one of the foremost philosophers of the 20th century. He made significant contributions to metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of art. Standardly his works are considered in isolation, and are not seen as resting upon each other in any significant way. In *Nominalism and its Aftermath: the Philosophy of Nelson Goodman*, Dena Shottenkirk (Lecturer at Brooklyn College in New York) attempts to unite Goodman's philosophical enterprises under the nominalist framework he worked in. This is an insightful and promising line of inquiry. However, the book falls short of its goal due to misconceptions of Goodman's philosophical positions.

The work is composed of three main sections that focus on Goodman's metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of art. Each section draws heavily on the conclusions of its predecessors. Given the chronological order of Goodman's major publications (*The Structure of Appearance* (1951), *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (1955), and *Languages of Art* (1968)), this is plausible. However, as Shottenkirk rec-

ognizes, themes from all three interweave Goodman's work, so it would be a mistake to end the discussion there.

To understand the motivation behind Goodman's nominalism, some background may be helpful. According to naïve set theory, any collection of items constitutes a set. Unfortunately, this gives rise to the Russell paradox. The set of all sets that do not contain themselves contains itself if and only if it does not contain itself. Although intuitively plausible, it is inconsistent. Further, because arithmetic reduces to set theory, if naïve set theory is set theory, mathematics as a whole rests on shaky ground. Thus several mathematicians including Russell developed amended versions of set theory. Russell's ramified theory of types constrains set membership in a manner that he describes as «perverse» (Bertrand Russell 1908). Every other non-naïve set theory contains elements that are equally unintuitive. All are desperate expedients to restore consistency.

Nelson Goodman took a much bolder course. He denied the existence of sets, restricting his ontology to individuals. The two guiding principles governing his

nominalism are 'entities are identical just in case their parts are identical' and 'there is no entity without an identity'. The first principle excludes set theory, because many different sets have exactly the same elements. The second excludes intensional entities such as properties, because they lack determinate identity conditions. Anything that satisfies the two conditions qualifies as an individual — so it is possible for abstract, concrete, mental and physical things to be individuals. Goodman devoted much of his early career to determining what could be accomplished with such a limited ontological framework. He and Henry Leonard developed a version of mereology — the calculus of individuals (Nelson Goodman and Henry Leonard 1940). In 'Steps toward a Constructive Nominalism' (1947) Goodman and W. V. Quine investigated how much of mathematics could be salvaged in an ontology without sets.

Philosophers standardly assume that so drastically restricting metaphysical resources must yield an impoverished philosophy. However, in *The Structure of Appearance*, Goodman shows that eschewing sets, properties and natural kinds can be liberating. We can acknowledge that members of any extension have something in common — i.e., the membership in that extension. Atypical kinds may be interesting and informative. There is no incentive to think that there is a single, basic way the world is. In *The Structure of Appearance* Goodman develops a phenomenalist system to illustrate the power of his form of nominalism. But he does not claim that it does or should underwrite physicalism. There are many ways things can be organized. Phenomenalism is a way of structuring appearances.

*The Structure of Appearance* is a work in formal philosophy that is heavily influenced by Carnap's *Aufbau* (1928). Observing parallels with logical positivism, Shottenkirk says that Goodman claims

that «philosophy is not about 'the world' but about the language through which we see the world, and the latter is primarily ascertained through science» (68). This is wrong on multiple counts. It is at best misleading to say that Goodman thinks that philosophy is not about the world. He holds that symbols refer to items in the world. The word 'cat' and a picture of a cat is about a cat, not about the way we represent cats. The word 'individual' is about an individual, not about the way we represent individuals. Goodman does not hold that understanding is couched exclusively in language. In *Languages of Art* he claims that works of art function in non-linguistic symbol-systems which enable us to understand things in non-linguistic ways. He denies that understanding is primarily achieved through science. He insists that «the arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding» (WW, 102).

One of the most glaring mistakes in *Nominalism and its Aftermath* concerns the presentation of the grue paradox. Goodman is well known for demonstrating that we do not have an adequate conception of inductive validity. Previously, many thinkers accepted the principle that if one has observed many *A*'s in the past and they have all been *B*'s and no *A*'s that are not *B*'s, one has reason to believe that unobserved *A*'s are also *B*'s. Then Goodman introduced 'grue'. Something is grue just in case it is observed before time *t* and found to be green, or not observed before time *t* and is blue. If time *t* is in the future, all observed emeralds have the property of being grue — for all emeralds have been observed before time *t* and have been found to be green. Given the inductive principle set out above, we have inductive evidence that all emeralds are grue. But the same evidence supports the con-

clusion that all emeralds are green. So by the above principle, our observations provide reason to believe that an emerald not observed before  $t$  is both green and blue. This is preposterous. Shottenkirk mischaracterizes the problem. She states: «Since evidence statements regarding all the emeralds before  $t$  confirm that they are all grue, they unfortunately confirm, in turn, both of the competing hypotheses, e.g., 1) that all emeralds are green and 2) that all emeralds are blue» (84). This is incorrect. The observation of green emeralds does not confirm the hypothesis that all emeralds are blue — indeed, it disproves it. If all that is required for confirmation is conformity to the evidence, the observation confirms that emeralds that have not been observed before time  $t$  are blue. That in itself is problematic.

Goodman argues that not all predicates are projectible; so not all are suitable for using in induction or projecting from known to unknown cases. Predicates like 'green' are projectible and predicates like 'grue' are not. Although all emeralds observed before  $t$  are grue, we cannot make inductive inferences from that fact to the conclusion that all emeralds are grue. The critical question is what accounts for projectibility.

Shottenkirk holds that Goodman's answer is a form of social constructivism. «Predicates are entrenched because they are in accordance with the practice of the community» (85). This is incorrect for several reasons. Goodman claims that a predicate is entrenched if it and its cognates have been projected far more often than any rivals it has. Non-projective uses of predicates are irrelevant. Because he includes cognates, his analysis is not dependent on any particular community. That 'green' is entrenched depends not only on the use of 'green' in projections by English speakers, but also on the use of 'verde' in projections by Spanish speakers, and on the use of all transla-

tions and coextensive terms in projections by speakers in any community. Further, entrenchment is not sufficient for projectibility. A projectible hypothesis must also have known positive instances, no known negative instances, and some undetermined instances. Whether or not a given predicate like «green» was projected in the past is dependent on the ways various linguistic communities used words. But whether a predicate is projectible is not a matter of community consensus.

Shottenkirk intimates that the grue paradox is problematic for Goodman because his nominalist framework does not allow natural kinds. If this were so, the paradox would not have had the monumental impact on epistemology that it did. Everyone concerned with induction or counterfactual reasoning has to take it seriously, not only nominalists. Recognizing natural kinds does not solve the problem. Goodman's challenge to realists is: even if there are natural kinds, what justifies you in thinking that 'green', rather than 'grue' is one of them?

A further problem with *Nominalism and its Aftermath* is that it mischaracterizes Goodman's epistemological stance. Shottenkirk states that Goodman «maintains a modified coherentism» (77). Although she admits that he is not strict coherentist, she holds that he simply altered a coherence account of knowledge. This is not an accurate description. Historically, epistemologies were characterized as foundationalist or coherentist. Foundationalism maintains that knowledge is grounded on beliefs whose certainty derives from experience or reason. Coherentism maintains that knowledge is grounded in a given belief's functioning within a coherent system in which each belief supports and is supported by the others in that system. A typical problem with foundationalism is that even the most basic beliefs can be thrown into question. They are not certain. The

problem with coherentism is that it is perfectly possible to have a system of completely coherent but false beliefs. One of Goodman's most significant contributions to epistemology was to devise a way to avoid both objections. He holds that the beliefs we have are initially credible. That someone believes that *p* is sufficient for there to be a slight reason to believe that *p*. However, initial credibility is a very weak and limited degree of credibility. If our initially credible beliefs come into conflict with one another, we make adjustments. We revise them to bring them into agreement. «A rule is amended if it yields an inference we are unwilling to accept; an inference is rejected if it violates a rule we are unwilling to amend. The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inference; and in the agreement achieved lies the only justification needed for either» (FFF, 64). When a balance is struck, we are in a state of reflective equilibrium. Because we are dealing with initially credible beliefs, the system is not fully coherentist, but because their coherence within a system strengthens their credibility, the system is also not fully foundationalist. Goodman's insight is that foundationalism is right in holding that something beyond coherence is required, but that coherentism is right in holding that nothing is certain independent of the other beliefs we hold.

Shottenkirk's discussion of Goodman's aesthetics is problematic as well. One of the central theses in *Languages of Art* is that works of art function as symbols in symbol systems. This does not mean, as Shottenkirk claims, that art «is understood through the language that describes it» (152). One understands a work of art by understanding it as a symbol in the symbol system in which it functions. The symbol system need not be linguistic. We understand

an impressionist painting or tone poem that we have before never observed because we know from our encounters with other impressionist works how to read impressionist symbols. Music, painting, dance, and architecture use non-linguistic symbols.

Unlike linguistic symbols, paintings are syntactically and semantically dense. Slight differences in marks on a canvas constitute differences in what the symbol is and what it refers to. Linguistic symbols are not so fine-grained. They are semantically dense but not syntactically dense. If *Don Quixote* were printed with 14-point font instead of 12-point font, it would be the same work of literature. Further, works of art exemplify. They refer to labels they instantiate. Goodman is careful to note that not all labels are linguistic. The labels exemplified in a work of art can also belong to a syntactically and semantically dense system. This is why we cannot say exactly what the Mona Lisa's smile expresses. It metaphorically exemplifies an elusive label for something that has no word.

While discussing the implications of nominalism on Goodman's philosophy of art, Shottenkirk maintains that Goodman cannot recognize mental states or entities. She says that this clearly follows from his rejection of intensional entities (146-7). This is not correct. Goodman cannot countenance mental states or entities without determinate identity conditions, but Shottenkirk provides no argument that mental entities lack determinate identity conditions. Goodman maintains that works of art vehicles for understanding, hence that aesthetics is a branch of epistemology. He holds that «in aesthetic experiences, the emotions function cognitively» (LA, 248). This would be utterly unintelligible if he held that emotions do not exist.

Shottenkirk began with a promising premise. However, misunderstandings in Goodman's philosophical positions

hinder her progress. To those unacquainted with Goodman's work this book would be more confusing than revealing. To those familiar with Goodman, enough time would be spent catching errors that it makes this work a challenging read. Shottenkirk may be right to hold that Goodman's nominal-

ism creates difficulties for his epistemology and philosophy of art. But *Nominalism and its Aftermath* does not show it.

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SARTWELL, Crispin (2010)

*Political Aesthetics*

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La relación entre el arte y la política, entre el poder y la cultura, ha sido objeto de debate por siglos. Una premisa recurrente dentro de estos debates es que toda acción humana es política, está vinculada a la coyuntura o ideología de su tiempo, entonces toda obra de arte es política, todo arte es político. Justamente ésa es la premisa que cuestiona Crispin Sartwell en su última publicación *Political Aesthetics*. El libro discute —a través de un análisis histórico, cultural y filosófico— una serie de cuestiones contemporáneas que surgen en la intersección, a menudo problemática, entre el arte y la política. El autor desarrolla una interesante reflexión a partir de una serie de ejemplos o casos de estudio tales como las películas de propaganda nazi de Leni Riefenstahl o la música *punk* y los grafitis, para así examinar el alcance y el reclamo de la estética política. En este libro, diseñado como un tratado no convencional y poco ortodoxo de estética y política, se plantea y defiende la importancia fundamental de la estética política como componente constituyente de los sistemas políticos, los regímenes y las ideologías. Esta tesis está argumentada por un meticuloso análisis, animado por rasgos de ingenio y perspicacia, que oscila entre los diversos casos de estudio y recorridos teóricos a tra-

vés de conceptos centrales como la belleza y la sublimidad, el lenguaje y la forma o la representación y el estado.

El autor, Crispin Sartwell (1958), es profesor de filosofía e historia del arte en Dickinson College, Pensilvania. Igualmente, ha enseñado filosofía, comunicación y ciencias políticas en diferentes instituciones académicas, entre las que se encuentran Vanderbilt University, The University of Alabama, Penn State y The Maryland Institute College of Art. También es periodista y crítico de música. Se doctoró por la Universidad de Virginia con la tesis titulada *Art and Articulation* (pictorial representation in Dewey, Heidegger, Goodman, Gadamer) dirigida por Richard Rorty. Autodenominado anarquista, ha publicado varios libros entre los que se encuentran *Six Names of Beauty* y *Against the State: An Introduction to Anarchist Political Theory*.

*Political Aesthetics* está dividido en siete capítulos contenidos entre la introducción y la conclusión final, de los cuales cuatro de ellos son casos de estudio y los otros tres, marcos teóricos. Cada capítulo teórico despliega algunos de los más relevantes recursos de cada una de estas disciplinas: estética filosófica, filosofía política e historia del arte, para evidenciar algunas de las conexio-