

PHILOSOPHIA SCIENTIÆ

ISRAËL SCHEFFLER

**Some responses to Goodman's comments
in starmaking**

Philosophia Scientiæ, tome 2, n° 2 (1997), p. 207-211

http://www.numdam.org/item?id=PHSC_1997__2_2_207_0

© Éditions Kimé, 1997, tous droits réservés.

L'accès aux archives de la revue « *Philosophia Scientiæ* » (<http://poincare.univ-nancy2.fr/PhilosophiaScientiæ/>) implique l'accord avec les conditions générales d'utilisation (<http://www.numdam.org/conditions>). Toute utilisation commerciale ou impression systématique est constitutive d'une infraction pénale. Toute copie ou impression de ce fichier doit contenir la présente mention de copyright.

NUMDAM

Article numérisé dans le cadre du programme
Numérisation de documents anciens mathématiques

<http://www.numdam.org/>

**Some Responses to Goodman's Comments
in *Starmaking***

Israël Scheffler

*Philosophy of Education Research Center
Harvard University - USA*

Abstract. The disagreement between Goodman and myself concerning his claim that we make worlds by making versions has persisted throughout several exchanges between us since 1980. This paper is a critical response to Goodman's latest defense of his claim in his "Comments" in [McCormick (ed.) 1996]. I continue to argue that if a version of our making turns out to be true, it hardly follows that we have made its object.

Résumé. Le désaccord entre Goodman et moi au sujet de son affirmation selon laquelle nous faisons des mondes en faisant des versions a persisté à travers de multiples échanges entre nous depuis 1980. Ce texte est une réponse critique à la dernière défense en date de son affirmation par Goodman dans ses "Comments" [McCormick (ed.) 1996]. Je continue à soutenir que si une version de notre fabrication se trouve être vraie, il s'ensuit difficilement que nous avons fait ses objets.

1. Introduction

Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking* claims that "We make worlds by making versions" [Goodman 1978, 94]. My denial of this claim was first expressed in my paper, "The Wonderful Worlds of Goodman", which argued that "whether there is or is not an object satisfying a version of our making is not, in general, up to us" [Scheffler 1980, 109; see also McCormick, 140]. The thesis that it is we who made the stars by making star-versions I thus disputed as clearly false if not meant to be taken as purely rhetorical [Scheffler 1980, 209; see also Goodman 1978, 110].

This disagreement between Goodman and myself has now persisted throughout several exchanges, with Goodman's most recent statement on the issue contained in his "Comments" in *Starmaking* [Goodman 1996]. As it happened, *Starmaking* appeared while my *Symbolic Worlds* [Scheffler 1997] was in press, thus precluding an extended reply therein to Goodman's "Comments". However, I did manage to append a last-minute footnote, stating, "I continue to maintain that a version of our making may purport to be true; whether it succeeds or not goes beyond the bare making, which therefore does not determine its truth, if true, nor create either the objects of which it speaks, or their alleged properties" [Scheffler 1997, 209]. Now, shortly before the Nancy conference, which I was unable to attend, Goodman asked me to spell out my responses to his "Comments". At his request, I proceeded to formulate such responses, which I shall now outline briefly in the following pages.

2. Making and Imputing

To the question, "How can a version make something that existed only long before the version itself?", Goodman says it raises

no special difficulty and adduces the question, "How can a version make something far away from it?", saying this question seems to give us no concern, and concluding "Why be disturbed, then, by a present version imputing a past temporal location to an event?" [Goodman 1996, 213]. Here I notice an illegitimate shift between *making* in the original question, to *imputing* in Goodman's conclusion. I am of course not disturbed by a version's imputing a past temporal location to an event, but I continue to be disturbed by the contention that the version in question made that event.

3. Distributing

Goodman says that a present-day version saying that astronomical body B was formed one million years ago "is typical of versions that distribute things over time and space, and in doing so make the time and space. This is done in all historical and much other discourse without disquieting the philosopher" [Goodman 1996, 213]. Now I submit that a version that distributes things over time and space is one that, more strictly, *asserts them* to be distributed over time and space. It does not determine them to be so distributed. My version of history distributes the events of the American Revolution over various temporal locations in the eighteenth century, but I made neither the Revolution nor the eighteenth century.

4. Dialogues in Limbo

Goodman objects to my dialogue as an account of his views [McCormick, 209-211] as I object to his as an account of mine [McCormick, 166-167 and 175-177]. Despite his criticisms of my dialogue, he correctly states its main point, as follows: "Scheffler is arguing that we should not say that versions make worlds, since we cannot, merely by producing a version, bring into being something that answers to it" [McCormick, 211]. However, he takes me to be conceding that *what* a world is may be dependent on versions, although *that* it is is not. And he attributes to me the ridiculous view that "A version cannot make a world; something else is needed. The needed auxiliary, quite independent of all versions, must be bare facts... that is, belong to the world itself. So what is needed to make a world is a version plus its world" [McCormick, 211].

Now that a true version *V* asserts both that *a* exists and that it has a certain property *P* shows neither that *V* made *a* nor that *V* made it the case that *a* has *P*. That a certain ancient star collapsed eons ago may now be truly asserted by my version, without *its* making either the star or its collapse. What brought the star into being and caused its collapse are questions to be investigated by astronomy or

cosmology. In no case is recourse to some all-purpose auxiliary such as Nature or a Deity required to supplement my version.

5. Temporal Relativity

Goodman's illustration of temporal relativity concerns "three past stellar explosions at different distances from the earth and two correct versions of their temporal order". In one version, the three are "ordered according to precedence of their occurrence in astronomical time". In the other version, they are "ordered according to their appearance or perception on earth". According to Goodman, both versions are true and "are of different worlds if they conflict". In answering the question, "When was the latest explosion?", one person may say, "A million years ago", and another may say, "Yesterday". "Even if both are speaking of the same explosion *a*, their answers respond to different interests and needs" [McCormick, 208-209].

Now the notion of an explosion is ambiguous; we need to separate the explosive event itself from the event of its "appearance or perception on earth". The two orders of precedence are then not in conflict and need not be assigned to different worlds. Even if this ambiguity is disregarded, the time of a given explosion relative to one set of 'interests' or 'needs' may consistently vary from its time relative to another.

6. Making and Remaking

Goodman suggests that my objection to worldmaking can be obviated by recognizing that "the making is mostly remaking and may involve the participation of other means and the presence of other conditions." Thus, he argues, 'worldmakers', as applied to versions is no more inappropriate a description than 'shoemaker', 'cabinetmaker', 'coffee-maker', etc. [McCormick, 209]. But my worries about worldmaking stem from other sources than the issue of 'remaking'. We do certainly make shoes, cabinets, and coffee, using a variety of relevant materials, but we do not make shoes, cabinets or coffee that antedated our own existence. Nor do our *versions* of such items make them as Goodman supposes that versions make worlds.

7. Conclusion

"If a version of our making turns out to be true, it hardly follows that we have made its object. Neither Pasteur nor his version of the germ theory made the bacteria he postulated, nor was Neptune

created either by Adams and Leverrier or by their prescient computations” [Scheffler 1986, 84 and McCormick, 163].

A more recent example:

According to a recent obituary [New York Times, February 22, 1997] Dr. Robert Herman shared the Henry Draper Medal in 1993 for work he did in 1940 suggesting the existence, somewhere in space, of echoes of the Big Bang, “the primeval fireworks at the dawn of the universe.” His calculations, beginning with data on concentrations of isotopes of heavy nuclei in the Earth’s crust, affirmed the echoes of Big Bang radiation, later confirmed by Bell Laboratories in the 1960’s, and by implication affirmed the Big Bang itself. But Dr. Herman assuredly did not make the Big Bang.

References

Goodman, N.

1978 *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis : Hackett Publishing Company.

1996 Comments, in : [McCormick 1996, 203-213].

McCormick, P. J. (ed.)

1996 *Starmaking*, Cambridge Massachusetts : M.I.T. Press.

Scheffler, I.

1980 The Wonderful Worlds of Goodman, *Synthese*, 45, 201-209.

1986 *Inquiries*, Indianapolis : Hackett Publishing Company.

1997 *Symbolic Worlds*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.