

I have been struck by the following comments of Hilary Putnam in discussing an important development in his own philosophy:

I began to move away from hard-core scientific realism . . . partly because I was discovering the important work of a philosopher who has always insisted that understanding the arts is as important as understanding science in understanding cognition. That philosopher is Nelson Goodman. I found myself agreeing with Goodman's insistence that the world does not have a 'ready-made' or 'built-in' description; many descriptions may 'fit,' depending on our interests and purposes. (This does not mean that anything we happen to like 'fits.' That more than one description may be right does not mean that every description is right, or that rightness is subjective.) While I could not agree when Goodman went so far as to say that there is not one 'world' but many worlds and that these are of our own making, I still find his work a continuing source of stimulation. At this time I also began to take seriously . . . the idea that 'value judgments,' far from being devoid of 'cognitive meaning,' are actually presupposed in all cognition; fact and value interpenetrate. . . . [T]he denial that reality dictates one unique description and the conception of fact and value as interpenetrating rather than discrete are as central to my thinking now as they were then ("A Half Century of Philosophy, Viewed from Within," *Daedalus*, 126, 1 [Winter 1997]: 198 f.).

Of particular interest to me in this is whether it doesn't suffice to provide the rationale for the pluralistic (as distinct from any monistic) pluralism that I understand to be integral to my "fourth option" in the Christian theology of religions. Essential to this option, as I understand it, is its difference from relativism. But if Goodman is right, that many "world views," in Geertz's sense, may "fit" need not mean that any world view we happen to like "fits." Nor does more than one world view's possibly being right mean that every world view is right, or that the rightness of a world view is subjective. On the contrary, provided world views are (1) directly concerned with ultimate reality's meaning-for-us and only indirectly concerned with its structure-in-itself; and (2) are characteristically formulated in symbolic rather than literal language, there's good reason why one may give a pluralistic account of alternative world views without in the least asserting or implying relativism.

Of course, no such account could be complete without something like a transcendental metaphysics that is at once broad and austere, in the way in which I

understand it to be. For without such a metaphysics there can be no nonreductive way of establishing that any world view is right and that its rightness is not subjective.

10 November 2007