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## Durkheim, Goodman, Rorty, and Mild-Mannered Pragmatism: French and American Style\*

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### I

At present an energetic and often volatile debate can be heard in many academic circles. A churlish description of this debate might read something like this. There is an argument between those who maintain that truth and knowledge are independent of human thought, and therefore our job is to strive to *find* them and those who claim that truth and knowledge are *made* by human thought. The "realists" maintain the former view while the "relativists" hold the latter. The realists are out to save such longstanding notions as "truth," "objectivity," and "sure knowledge," alleging that the relativists are leading us toward emotivism in morality, pragmatism in science, and anarchy in politics. The relativists, on the other hand, are out to deconstruct such illusory notions as "truth," "objectivity," and "sure knowledge," claiming that the realists are leading us back to foundationalism in morality, positivism in science, and conservatism in politics.

This description is churlish for several reasons. "The" debate takes on myriad shapes, and hence it is misleading to address it as a single dispute. In literary criticism we hear disagreement over "the meaning" of a text—is it *found* in the text itself, or in the intention of the

\* This essay is a portion of my working manuscript, "Individuals in Community: Durkheim's Communitarian Defense of Liberalism," to be published by Stanford University Press. I am indebted to Mary Douglas, David Hull, Henry Levinson, and Jeffrey Stout for their helpful comments.

author, or is it *made* by the interpretive community or the solitary reader? In ethics there is a disagreement about whether a single morality is *discovered* in human nature, or is morality *asserted*, variously, by cultures or even individuals? And one can imagine a physicist arguing that in literature meaning is produced differently by each reader, in ethics there is a single morality for all humanity, and, as for her own work, she is not concerned with whether particle waves *really* exist just so long as she can make new and improved models and predictions given everything physicists know so far.

How, then, can it be said that there is a single debate between realists and relativists about whether we make or find our moral, literary, or physical world? Moreover, not only does “the” debate appear differently from discipline to discipline, it can vary within a discipline and produce varieties of relativists and realists. In philosophy, ontological relativists argue with conceptual relativists, while metaphysical realists disagree with scientific realists.

Still, there is in the academic guilds much discussion over issues called epistemological or interpretive or hermeneutical. And a useful, albeit crude, way of noting family resemblances among these interlocutors is to divide them into two parties: those who subscribe to *world-making* and those who subscribe to *world-finding*. I am not claiming that making versus finding represents the essence of the current discussions. I am claiming that the vocabulary of finding and making allows me to highlight and address a common feature of many current epistemological debates.

Emile Durkheim and Nelson Goodman are pragmatists who, in different ways, show us the relevant and irrelevant differences between making and finding a world. Now pragmatism, like most tags designating schools of thought, means different things to different people. I want to use the term in a particular way. I exclude styles of pragmatism that are sometimes called vulgar. Jeffrey Stout’s “Lexicon” gives examples of these: “consequentialism applied to mental acts; the view that cost-benefit calculation is the ultimate language of rational commensuration...; the doctrine that the essence of knowledge is problem-solving capability...”<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to justify calling these vulgar. I note only that I am not including them. By mild-mannered pragmatism, I refer to those approaches that 1) reject the Enlightenment’s *metaphysical* distinctions between knowledge and opinion, facts

and values, reason and emotion, science and morality or art, and 2) embrace a *plurality* of ad hoc methods and descriptions in order to account for particular aspects of the world.

This second feature ensures that, for my purposes, pragmatism and antifoundationalism are not taken as synonyms. It excludes, for example, reductionists like some Nietzscheans who systematically reduce morality to emotivism. It also ensures that pragmatism be mild-mannered. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Romantics offered response to the Enlightenment’s dichotomies. They accepted them, but championed art and the emotions over science and reason. The poet, not the scientist, was put forward as the cultural hero. Mild-mannered pragmatism, on the other hand, refuses to make such sweeping pronouncements. It tends to shun both metaphysics and reductionism, keeping its eyes on the ground, suggesting specific judgments for particular cases.

There is a third feature of mild-mannered pragmatism closely related to the other two. It opposes the idea that morality, art, and science are best understood as the result of discrete individuals. It opposes, in other words, a host of atomistic theories that can be labeled methodological individualism. I am interested in Durkheim’s contribution to the first two features—antifoundationalism and epistemological pluralism. I am more concerned, however, with Durkheim and the third feature. For here we see how Durkheim intimately relates individuals to their social and linguistic worlds. It poses still another challenge to (vulgar) liberalism and its assumption that society is composed of radically independent individuals.

To call mild-mannered pragmatism a particular style is not to deny its general (imprecise) character. It excludes some thinkers, but it can be applied to many—even those not customarily called pragmatists. Durkheim explicitly rejects “pragmatism,” and Goodman never identifies himself with it. Still, I think my definition reasonable and that they both can be usefully described by it.

Elsewhere I discuss the relevance of Durkheim’s social epistemology to the issue of antagonism between the individual and society.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I outline Durkheim and Goodman’s pragmatic approach to epistemology in light of the present debate between realism and relativism, or as I will describe it, between finding and making truth,

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 297.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 5 of my *Individuals in Community: Durkheim’s Communitarian Defense of Liberalism* (forthcoming, Stanford Press).

knowledge, and objectivity. The result is rather irenic, for I show, with the help of Goodman and Durkheim, in what way we both make and find a world. While enabling us to appreciate this, they clarify some good and sensible sentiments found in forms of realism and forms of relativism. We learn that we no longer have to be in that uncomfortable position of having to choose one side against the other.

The mediating manner of Goodman and Durkheim (their willingness to mix philosophical vocabularies and approaches) can be called pragmatic, at least by the lights of the American pragmatist, William James. In *Pragmatism* he lists a series of opposing philosophical positions, for example, “rationalistic/empiricist,” “idealistic/materialistic,” “free-willist/fatalistic.”<sup>3</sup> He goes on to note that “most of us have a hankering for the good things on both sides of the line.” We professional philosophers, however, “cannot preserve a good intellectual conscience so long as we keep mixing incompatibles from opposite sides of the line.” To save us from bad faith, James offers pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy our intuitions about the “good things on both sides of the line.” Pragmatism also rejects much from both sides. “A pragmatist,” James writes, “turns his back resolutely and once and for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns toward concreteness and adequacy, towards actions, and towards power.”<sup>4</sup> Pragmatism, then, “unstiffens all our theories,” setting each to work—insofar as it can—on concrete problems, specific cares. Durkheim and Goodman, I argue, exhibit this philosophical style, this mild-mannered pragmatism. In particular, they liberate us from those “inveterate habits” that insist that the world is either found *or* made, but not both.

Goodman is at his best when he limns the ways of worldmaking. Durkheim is at his best when he delineates the ways of worldfinding. Each man’s virtue has occasionally been taken as his vice: Goodman the radical relativist, Durkheim the conservative realist-positivist. The appellations are misplaced insofar as both thinkers disrupt the standard contours of the realist-relativist debate, handling many old philosophical problems in important new ways. They do this by dis-

cussing knowledge, truth, and objectivity in terms of entrenchment, authority, and tradition. Their approach no more belittles the objectivity of worlds found than it denies the creativity of worlds made. They show the interdependence of finding and making and, more important, the nature of that interdependence. This is where Richard Rorty figures in. Toward the end of the essay I argue that Rorty fails to attend to this interdependence, and that this negligence weakens his case for pragmatism and impedes sound and charitable readings of his work.

## II.1

In the foreword to *Ways of Worldmaking*, Goodman says of that book, “What emerges can perhaps be described as a radical relativism under rigorous restraints...”<sup>5</sup> What is a radical relativism under rigorous restraints? It recognizes that “the world”—and all therein, from Shakespeare’s Hamlet to Fermi’s neutrinos—is not “fixed and found” but, rather, consists of worlds or versions of the world that are fluid and ever in the making. Yet, while embracing indeterminacy, it accepts that there are constraints on worldmaking. Worldmaking, most of the time, is not a capricious or whimsical activity. Goodman warns, “while readiness to recognize alternative worlds may be liberating and suggestive of new avenues of exploration, a willingness to welcome all worlds builds none.” And elsewhere, he notes, “recognition of multiple alternative world-versions betokens no policy of laissez-faire. Standards distinguishing right from wrong versions become, if anything, more rather than less important.”<sup>6</sup> A pressing issue, then, for Goodman, is: What constraints are imposed on worldmaking?

Worldmaking is not a matter of an individual arbitrarily deciding how she wants the world to be and then proceeding to describe it as such. This radical form of relativism or subjectivism Goodman rejects. His talk of a plurality of worlds or versions of worlds in no way commits him to the claim that each individual lives in a separate, discrete one. He maintains that worldmakers—and that includes all of us—are born into worlds already made:

The many stuffs—matter, energy, waves, phenomena—that worlds are made of are made along with the worlds. But made from what? Not

<sup>3</sup> William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 13.

<sup>4</sup> James 31.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (New York: Hackett, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Goodman 21, 107.

from nothing, after all, but *from other worlds*. Worldmaking as we know it always starts from the worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking.<sup>7</sup>

We no more choose our first language or the colors of the rainbow than we choose our parents. The various shared descriptions of the world about us — these are “the given.” Hence Goodman writes “reality in a world, like realism in a picture, is largely a matter of habit.” Described reality is handed down to us, and we refashion it — rejecting some portions, accepting or modifying others — according to beliefs and needs and goals at hand. Goodman is interested, then, in those “processes involved in building a world out of others,” in “how worlds are made, tested, and known.” Offering us detailed and perspicuous accounts of everyday ways of worldmaking (composition and decomposition, weighing and emphasizing, ordering and arranging, deleting and supplementing, quoting and lying), Goodman provides detailed descriptions of what otherwise would be another abstract, philosophical concept — worldmaking.

“Reality in a world... is largely a matter of habit.” This is bound to offend some. They will ask, “Is the nature of a rock contingent on human habit?” or “Are we really to suppose that the falling tree in the desolate forest makes no sound?” Goodman resists giving standard realist or idealist responses to this line of questioning. For example, when asked, “Is the seen table the same as the mess of molecules?” Goodman replies:

To such questions, discussed at length in the philosophical literature, I suspect that the answer is a firm *yes* and *no*. The realist will resist the conclusion that there is no world; the idealist will resist the conclusion that all conflicting versions describe different worlds. As for me, I find these views equally delightful and equally deplorable — for after all, the difference between them is purely conventional!<sup>8</sup>

Are the apparent table and the molecular one the same table? Would those hard, granular things we call rocks be rocks if humans never showed up? These questions, some claim, make up much of the history of modern philosophy. Has Goodman dismissed traditional problems of modern philosophy? Not exactly. He has, rather, handled traditional issues in novel ways. How much of the world is made of

facts, and how much of theories? Goodman answers, “facts are small theories, and true theories are big facts.” Refusing to endorse one of the standard theories, or to construct an all-too-tidy, full-blown system, Goodman reworks old questions in handy and refreshing new ways. As William James recommends, Goodman works like the mild-mannered pragmatist, mediating and reconciling, “unstiffening our theories.”<sup>9</sup>

Take Goodman’s discussion of worldmaking, then, not as a reductive *theory* about the way the world “really is.” It is not an attempt to disclose the essence of “the world.” It is not even a theory about worldmaking (if “a theory about worldmaking” refers to something we need to become successful worldmakers). View it, rather, as an acknowledgment and analysis of the transactional relation between language, belief, knowledge, and a world in the making. Goodman shows various ways — some more traveled than others — in which we describe and redescribe, organize and recognize the world. He depicts some ways we make our world.

## II.2

One of those ways is *induction*. It is of special interest to Goodman because it illustrates some notable features of worldmaking.

In an early essay, Goodman describes induction as “the projection of characteristics of the past into the future, or more generally of characteristics of one realm of objects into another.”<sup>10</sup> Hume had investigated the nature of induction and concluded that it has more to do with custom and habit than with the way things “really” are. Goodman is nearly satisfied with Hume’s first conclusion but dismisses the second. Hume, of course, was rather disconcerted with the conclusion that induction had little to do with the way things really are knocked about. After all, one of the principal tasks of philosophy had been to eliminate experience (the stuff from which opinion emerged) in order to get at science, unadulterated knowledge. Yet Hume came to realize that the more one weeds experience out of rational thought the less one can say anything about anything. This was a dismal discovery, since experience was not trusted. Nonetheless, Hume never recanted: accustomed and habitual ways of living in and coping with

<sup>9</sup> See James 32, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson Goodman, “A Query on Confirmation,” *Journal of Philosophy* 43 (1946) 383. Also, *Problems and Projects* (New York: Hackett, 1972) 363.

<sup>7</sup> Goodman 6.

<sup>8</sup> Goodman 119.

the world were the sources of understanding. Hence, concerning induction (and, for that matter, deduction), Hume writes, "tis impossible to determine, otherwise than by experience, what will result from any phenomenon, or what has preceded it."<sup>11</sup>

From the start, many complained that Hume merely described how an induction took place, without telling how to justify or validate one. They agreed that observation and induction were largely guided by experience. The *problem* was how to escape from previous observations and inductions based on custom, and arrive at (valid) ones based on the way things (or minds) really are. This "problem," of course, has never been solved, and it has become known to some as *Hume's*. Goodman protests the designation, "Hume's problem." The so-called problem of justifying induction largely *is* one of describing induction. Hume understood and accepted this. His critics are the ones who have a problem with it. If Hume's account of induction is inadequate, it is not due to its descriptive nature but to the imprecision of the description. Goodman writes:

Regularities in experience, according to [Hume], give rise to habits of expectation; and thus it is predictions conforming to past regularities that are normal and valid. But Hume overlooks the fact that some regularities do and some do not establish such habits; that predictions based on some regularities are valid while predictions based on other regularities are not.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to this passage Goodman discusses grue emeralds, his famous illustration of a nonhabitual regularity and its invalid prediction. The example begins: "Suppose that all emeralds examined before a certain time *t* are green. At time *t*, then, our observations support the hypothesis that all emeralds are green..."<sup>13</sup> Next, Goodman introduces an unfamiliar predicate, "grue." Grue "applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue. Then at time *t* we have, for each evidence statement asserting that a given emerald is green, a parallel evidence statement asserting that the emerald is grue." If the evidence is the same, we

have no way of deciding between the prediction that the next emerald examined will be green and the prediction that it will be grue. Let us establish *t* at midnight. Since all emeralds examined before midnight have been green, we should predict that after waking tomorrow the first emerald examined will be green. Yet, according to the definition of the predicate grue, all emeralds hitherto examined have been grue (because they were green). Should we not, then, predict that tomorrow's emerald will be grue, and hence blue? The beauty and puzzlement of the example is that, though we know which predicate is projectible (well-behaved) and which is nonprojectible (ill-behaved), the "evidence statement" for each appears to be the same.

How do we determine the difference between well-behaved predicates like green and ill-behaved ones like grue? What are the constraints involved in this particular process of worldmaking known as induction? If worldmaking were simply a matter of *making* a world as I please, then I should be able to *decide* that tomorrow's emeralds will be grue. But we seldom settle such issues by fiat. Even if the evidence appears to be equal, we all know the predicate green has more going for it than grue. But what? Goodman writes:

We must consult the record of past projections of the two predicates. Plainly "green," as a veteran of earlier and many more projections than "grue," has a more impressive biography. The predicate "green," we may say, is much better *entrenched* than the predicate "grue." (FFF 94)

Here, then, is a constraint on worldmaking: "a projection is to be ruled out if it conflicts with the projection of a much better entrenched predicate." And an entrenched predicate is not simply a word or a name but a concept or a class. Hence those color-concepts that work similarly to green, such as aqua, partake in green's "impressive biography."

Yet what exactly, one may ask, is entrenched? A class of predicates or the actual colors they stand for? A human term or a worldly feature? This question is reminiscent of those about apparent tables and silently falling trees. Goodman, in good pragmatist form, avoids the narrow either/or responses commonly found in such debates. He prefers to cut and paste from seemingly opposing theories:

Like Hume, we are appealing to past recurrences, but to recurrences in the explicit use of terms as well as to recurrent features of what is

<sup>11</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) III.ix:111.

<sup>12</sup> David Hume, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) 82. Abbreviated FFF.

<sup>13</sup> The example of grue emeralds begins on page 73 of *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*. (A similar example is found in Hume's "A Query on Confirmation.")



observed. Somewhat like Kant, we are saying that inductive validity depends not only upon what is presented but also upon how it is organized; but the organization we point to is effected by the use of language and is not attributed to anything inevitable or immutable in the nature of human cognition. (FFF 96)

This brings us to the heart of induction, and to the heart of worldmaking. Earlier I said that a valid prediction agrees with past regularities, and that past regularities give rise to habitual ways of seeing and inferring. Now this: those regularities are not only described by, but are conceptually organized and constituted by our linguistic practices. "Thus the line," writes Goodman, "between valid and invalid predictions (or inductions or projections) is drawn upon the basis of how the world is and has been described and anticipated in words" (FFF 121). We can now drop the metaphysical issue of whether induction and other forms of worldmaking are a matter of getting in touch with the *actual* world or of fabricating a world out of *merely* human categories. The *metaphysical* question, Do we make or find a world? no longer has the force of a question that we can answer. Or, if some think they can answer it (perhaps by theology or some other metaphysical commitments), their answer will have little to do with how we go about making inductions or love or cabinets. The answer to the metaphysical issue will, for the most part, leave the world as it is.

### II.3

Some readers may feel cheated. I have fettered worldmaking to a found world, and worldfinding to worlds made. This maneuver is perhaps too constraining for some, too permissive for others. Yet this delicate stratagem is none other than Goodman's, "a radical relativism under rigorous restraints." And the position is as liberating as it is assuring. Assuring, because it commits people to the claim that worldmaking is not an arbitrary activity. We are bound by a cultural-linguistic world. To say or to see something new is possible only because we are intimate with that world, with those old entrenched things like green emeralds.

Yet what of liberation? Some might complain, "How can you speak of anything *new*? You say all that is has been inherited. Are we not, then, tied to the past?" Novelty is both common and rare. Common because we are constantly remaking things found. We often give vet-

eran concepts new jobs, or leave them to die quietly in retirement. Novelty is also rare: seldom do we hear something highly original. Yet there is a continuum between everyday remaking and exceptional creativity, for all novelty springs from the familiar world found and lands on a new territory, thus contributing to worldmaking.

My linking worlds made to worlds found will perhaps be judged by the leery reader as overly conservative. But, if what I have said is not wide of the mark, it may be agreed that, epistemologically speaking, the relation between making and finding worlds has little to do with conservatism or radicalism. My claiming that there will be continuity in our descriptions of things and events in no way proscribes significant modification and openness. It is safe to say that, if no upheaval is noticed in most of our descriptions most of the time, that is because change, however subtle, is constant. Moreover, even the most revolutionary statements, if intelligible, spring from familiar material. Otherwise, we hear only gibberish. The crank specializes in gibberish, inventing radically new vocabularies or using old ones in unfamiliar ways. The (unrecognized) genius often does the same. Both use far too many rookies for us to follow; and hence we tend to abuse both. What is the difference between the crank and the genius? One speaks nonsense, the other makes sense (even if not comprehended at the time, or perhaps ever).

What has been said of induction applies to judgments of resemblance as well. We learn to compare things in various ways as we acquire sophisticated linguistic practices. To judge similarity among carpet samples, or among wines, or among friends, is to judge different things with various purposes in mind. Newly found similarities are based on older ones. Again, the point is that as we inherit ways of worldmaking, such as comparing and contrasting, we become worldmakers. The constraint on worldmakers is also the material for worldmaking: the assurance of a found world yields the liberty to make one.

We can think of entrenchment as a form of authority. Its authority, however, is not unconditional. Can we be *sure* the more entrenched predicate is to be preferred to the less entrenched one? No, we cannot. Goodman does not hang worldmaking on certitude. He offers an observation: we tend to go with the better entrenched predicate, *most of the time*. If we decide not to, it will be because the particulars of a case lead us in a different direction. Perhaps a rookie term (like quark) fits better than a veteran term (like electron) with the other entrenched features of an experiment. Radical and creative individuals

are likely to support rookies. Conservatives and the unimaginative shun them. In any case, entrenchment plays a leading role.<sup>14</sup>

Goodman tells us "the reason why only the right predicates happen so luckily to have become well entrenched is just that the well entrenched predicates have thereby become the right ones" (FFF 98). This sounds circular, and of course it is. We justify the rightness of predicates and categories with other predicates and categories. We should not fault Hume's critics for their desire to justify induction, but for the kind of justification they wanted—the kind that could escape the circularity of justifying rookie predicates with veterans.<sup>15</sup> Justification hangs on the authority of successfully entrenched concepts, and on the established organization in which they are found. Of course, to say as much will not help us come up with a good justification. There are as many good ways to assemble authority as there are puzzles to be solved, questions to be answered, results to be explained. The best—the most justifiable—solutions, answers, and explanations will be those that are most persuasive given all we know about the problem or puzzle at hand. There is no foundation for or essence to justification that, if known, could spare us the hard work of producing it. There is no stepping outside the circle. To try to is to attempt to step into God's, an attempt that in many ways characterizes modern epistemology. Hume was one of the first modern voices insisting that human knowledge will always be *human*. It will entail experience, custom, habit, authority, and tradition. Goodman follows his lead.

### III

Some readers might feel uneasy about where Goodman has led us. Entrenchment and authority may seem capricious when compared to the confidence we have in those scientific and everyday procedures such as induction and judging resemblance. The authority involved in these procedures, some might want to say, is the authority of objectivity or of rationality or even of truth. Those who balk at Goodman's talk of entrenchment are likely to reject his notion of *worldmaking*. It is here, I believe, that Durkheim can help. He ac-

<sup>14</sup> Of course, rookies can someday become veterans. When looking under the entry "green" in J. I. Rodale's *Synonym Finder* (Emmaus, Penn: Rodale Press, 1978), I found "greenish, viridescent, emerald, . . . grue." Somewhat to my disappointment, "grue" was not listed under the heading "blue."

<sup>15</sup> "Rookie" here includes a veteran predicate used in a novel way.

counts for the objectivity we sense in the world found, while also recognizing the creative, human aspect of a world in the making. He shows us the merit of those who are suspicious of Goodman, and yet, in the end, he supports Goodman. His style exhibits what I have called mild-mannered pragmatism. To illustrate this, I now turn to Durkheim's account of a variety of coherent worlds.

### III.1

Having read the available ethnographic material of his day, Durkheim was struck by the multiplicity of ways of organizing and categorizing the world. It was almost as if distinct societies and cultures lived each in their own world. Even the most seemingly simple human ability, such as seeing resemblances, could be manifested variously. In his and Mauss's much-neglected essay, "Primitive Classifications," they write that "what is conceived in one [society] as perfectly homogeneous is represented elsewhere as essentially heterogeneous."<sup>16</sup> And, in the introduction to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim writes, "the categories of human thought are never fixed in any one definite form; they are made, unmade and remade incessantly; they change with places and times."<sup>17</sup>

The two leading epistemological doctrines of his day, empiricism and a priorism, could not account for the variety of worlds Durkheim had encountered in ethnographies and historical studies. The empiricists, according to Durkheim, satisfy our sense that the individual's perception of the world is direct and unmediated, yet they deprive reason of its "universality," "necessity," and "authority." The upshot of this criticism is that the implicit individualism of empiricism cannot account for the *coherence* found within a given cultural world view. Tlingit Indians, for example, do not *choose* to see the similarity between a dog salmon and a dog (a similarity I have never been able to see). They just see it. Such vision carries a sense of necessity, authority, and—from a Tlingit's perspective—universality. If one doubts this, try protesting the similarity to a Tlingit. The coherence

<sup>16</sup> Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, *Primitive Classifications*, tr. Rodney Needham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 86. ("De quelques formes primitives de classification: contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives," *L'Année Sociologique* 6 [1903] 1-72.)

<sup>17</sup> *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, tr. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965) 28. Abbreviated *EF*.



of the Tlingit's world is brought about by the Tlingit's shared vision and ways of organizing and categorizing the world.

The a priorists, on the other hand, recognize the universality, necessity, and authority of human thought. The mind, transcending experience, imposes on it the universal and binding categories of reason. But, of this, the a priorists cannot give a satisfactory account. For, as Durkheim writes, "it is no explanation to say that [the powers of reason] are inherent in the nature of the human intellect" (EF 27). Kantians have shown why experience alone cannot produce human cognition. They are to be applauded for this. But "the real question," Durkheim claims, "is to know how it comes that experience is not sufficient unto itself, but presupposes certain conditions which are exterior and prior to it." Moreover, a priorism cannot account for the *variety* of worlds. If the powers of the mind are innate, why can't I detect the similarity between a dog salmon and a dog?

Durkheim maintains that progress toward a solution is possible by studying religion, for we are thereby "given a means of renewing the problems which, up to the present, have only been discussed among philosophers" (EF 21). Some might ask, What solution to an epistemological problem could possibly arise out of studying that messy cultural stuff, religion? Durkheim's response is that reason itself is shaped by unkempt historical, social institutions, and religion has been an especially formative one. What might seem to be basic, universal categories of human thought such as time, space, class, number, cause, substance, and personality are, in fact, culturally specific categories whose medium is language. Even the distinction between right and left or the law of noncontradiction, according to Durkheim, is a social-linguistic artifact and is "far from being inherent in the nature of man in general" (EF 25).

How does Durkheim account for a variety of coherent worlds? What is his solution? In good pragmatist style, he holds on to what is valuable in both the empiricist and the Kantian positions. He notes that "if this debate seems to be eternal, it is because the arguments given are really about equivalent" (EF 28). He manages to salvage the intuitions on both sides and to minimize their opposition, by bringing to this epistemological debate insight from his religious investigations. The chief insight is this: if "the *social* origin of the categories is admitted, a new attitude becomes possible, which will enable us to escape both of the opposed difficulties" (EF 28). His solution, then, is to socialize the idealists and the empiricists. Yes, human reason operates with categories, but these categories are not inherent in humans but

are created in the particular activities of various peoples. And yes, the individual does "directly" perceive the world, but that world is and always has been a social world, or, as Durkheim puts it, "the world is inside of society" (EF 490).

### III.2

Now, lest Durkheim sound like a radical relativist, which he is not, I need to add that even while Durkheim is unabashed while fleshing out the social nature of knowledge, he insists that we, as individuals, do not *make* our world:

We speak a language that we did not make; we use instruments that we did not invent; we invoke rights that we did not found; a treasury of knowledge is transmitted to each generation that it did not gather itself, etc. It is to society that we owe these varied benefits, and if we do not ordinarily see the source from which we get them, we at least know that they are not our own work. (EF 242-43)

Durkheim, more than Goodman, shows that our reason and practices, our knowledge and beliefs, in a phrase, our world as we know it, is the product of historical, social institutions. He does not provide, as does Goodman, perspicuous, detailed descriptions of ways of worldmaking in our own culture. Rather, investigating distant times and places, Durkheim tells us of diverse worlds, wrestles with the epistemological problems posed by them, and declares that the world is not a result of "our own work" but of evolving traditions, categories, and institutions.

When Durkheim claims that the world is not a result of our making, the "our" refers to you and to me and to any other individual or group today. This is not to say that Durkheim denies human creativity or that he thinks novelty is impossible. Durkheim, the historian, is quite aware of the vital role played by imagination and ingenuity. He rejects fatalism (the idea that individuals are "radically situated") as an inaccurate description of and normative prescription for modern individuals. Durkheim does, however, recognize and feature the fact that people work with inherited materials. This social inheritance is all-important for him because it signifies an intimate relation between individuals and their sociolinguistic communities. Having said this, consider how Durkheim accounts for the objectivity we sense in the world.

Durkheim begins his lectures on pragmatism by citing "the pragmatists'" (primarily James and Dewey's) criticism of rationalism and

empiricism. According to these two philosophical theories, “reason is thought of as existing outside of us... and truth is a given, either in the sensory world (empiricism) or in an intelligible world, in absolute thought or Reason (rationalism).”<sup>18</sup> Yet the pragmatists, according to Durkheim, insist that “*we* make reality”: “1) truth is human; 2) it is varied and variable; and 3) it cannot be a copy of a given reality” (PS 85, 37). Durkheim shares the pragmatist’s sentiment that “truth is not a ready-made system: it is formed, de-formed and re-formed in a thousand ways; it varies and evolves like all things human” (PS 24). And he sees an affinity between the pragmatists’ project and sociologists’:

Herein lies the interest of the pragmatist enterprise: we can see it as an effort to understand truth and reason themselves, to restore to them their human interest, to make of them human things that derive from temporal causes and give rise to temporal consequences... It is here that we can establish a parallel between pragmatism and sociology. By applying the *historical* point of view to the order of things human, sociology is led to set itself the same problem. *Man is a product of history; there is nothing in him that is either given or defined in advance...* Consequently, if truth is human, it too is a human product. Sociology applies the same conception to reason. All that constitutes reason, its principles and categories, has been made in the course of history. (PS 67; some emphasis added)

Durkheim’s reference to history at this point is revealing, and it becomes the basis of his criticism of pragmatism. The pragmatists, Durkheim claims, say that we make reality, and for them “the ‘we’ means the individual.” This individualism Durkheim finds bothersome, for it fails to address his old problem of how coherent, shared worlds are established: “individuals are different beings who cannot all make the world in the same way; and the pragmatists have had great difficulty in solving the problem of knowing how several different minds can know the same world at once” (PS 85). We can (temporarily) ignore Durkheim’s assessment of the pragmatists and still appreciate his solution to the problem of how to reconcile a social epistemology to some philosophical and everyday intuitions about coherence, truth, and objectivity:

<sup>18</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Pragmatism and Sociology*, tr. J. C. Whitehouse, ed. John B. Allcock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 12. (*Pragmatisme et sociologie* [Vrin, 1955].) Abbreviated PS.

If one admits that representation is a *collective* achievement, it recovers a unity which pragmatism denies to it. This is what explains the impression of resistance, the sense of something greater than the individual, which we experience in the presence of truth, and which provides the indispensable basis of objectivity. (PS 85)

Collective representations — patterned ways of viewing, describing, and explaining the world — guarantee a significant amount of social agreement that furnishes coherence and constitutes objectivity. What has Durkheim done? He has accounted for, and thereby attempted to safeguard, the *impersonal* character of reason, objectivity, and truth by disclosing their settled, sociohistorical grounding. In notable ways, then, we do *find* a world already set up by language, institutions, and beliefs. These are not made or chosen by the individual, these are “the given,” that is, the stuff of history — institutions, language, and beliefs — into which individuals are “thrown” (to use Heidegger’s metaphor). The given is not a set of determinate facts to be interpreted in one absolute way. Our interpretations of the world (whether they concern *A Tale of Two Cities* or the Thirty-Year-War or T-cell lymphoma) are indeed guided by objectivity. But that objectivity (whether it pertains to literary theory or history or science) is itself constituted by the stuff of history, whose nature could — and has been — described as interpretations of interpretations.

Durkheim, if in one of his positivistic moods, will talk as if institutions, language, and beliefs are determinate — even if social — facts. But, at his best, he recognizes degrees of indeterminacy *and* steadiness of a variety of social facts. The constraints of history (and history includes our thinking and speaking equipment) carry with them the weight of objectivity, the guiding force of reason, and the sacrosanct character of truth. If these qualities or virtues are esteemed, one reason is we know that they are *found* in the world, and not arbitrarily *made*.

### III.3

Richard Rorty has said “nothing deep turns on the choice between... the imagery of making and finding.”<sup>19</sup> Rorty jettisons the *metaphysical* debate between making and finding, and for that he deserves praise.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 344.

But reasons remain, epistemological and ethical, for distinguishing between making and finding. Epistemologically, it is relevant to note that worldmaking begins with a world already made, with a world found. As we are trained, formally and informally, to use language (including predicates such as “green” and occasionally even “grue”) and to participate in institutions (including gestures such as a smile) we inherit a ready-made world. This inheritance is necessary for all worldmaking and worldmakers, scientists and philosophers included. Goodman is a case in point. His familiarity with the various debates between philosophical parties enables him to speak imaginatively within them. The philosophical debates are themselves examples of entrenched vocabularies. The vocabularies of realism and relativism, and their sundry quarrels, have accrued extensive histories (even impressive biographies). The persistence of these vocabularies, and their continual reformation, suggest the interdependence of finding and making.<sup>20</sup> Both have much going for them.

Another reason for preserving some distinction between making and finding has to do with truth-telling. The found world is unavoidable. You and I cannot simply make the world as we please. We belong to and are confronted by a world, by its communities and beliefs, by its thoughts and histories. This is not a metaphysical remark, but an ethical one. We encounter limits, we incur obligations. These restraints or resources—depending on one’s point of view—need to be recognized. They are inescapable aspects of human existence.

Now Durkheim, unlike Goodman, is quite concerned with the notion of truth and with saving its reputation. Why? Truth plays an important social role. It pertains to what I am calling inescapable aspects of human existence—our social and historical inheritance.

<sup>20</sup> I thank Henry Levinson for suggesting that philosophical realism itself be considered as an entrenched vocabulary. This strikes me as being true of philosophical notions of relativism as well. And I suspect that both vocabularies are fortified by ordinary language.

The language of realism is a common feature of everyday speech. We find missing keys, discover distant stars, and stumble over yesterday’s laundry. And when the toe bumps against the table leg, none will ask whether the table was a molecular or an apparent one. No doubt the “impressive biography” of the language of everyday realism is part of the story of how the philosophical realists’ vocabulary became and still remains entrenched.

The relativists’ vocabulary, too, abounds in our everyday speech. If you smile when you hear that I am the tallest member of my family, and that I am barely five feet,

Durkheim notes that “it is one thing to cast doubt on the correspondence between symbols and reality; but it is quite another to reject the thing symbolized along with the symbol. This pressure that truth is seen as exercising on minds is itself a symbol that must be interpreted, even if we refuse to make of truth something absolute and extrahuman” (*PS* 68). It is, then, the social, historical aspects of truth—of those things called true—that account for its “pressure” on us.

Most of the time, Rorty seems content to deconstruct the (seldom helpful) metaphysical distinction between making and finding. This involves, among other strategies, highlighting the circularity of philosophical efforts that attempt to *find* the world in-itself while employing languages that are human *made*. Sometimes, however, Rorty puts forward a case for worldmaking. In his most recent book, for example, he claims that the Romantic notion that “truth is made rather than found” is correct in that “languages are made rather than found, and that truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences.”<sup>21</sup> This strikes me as a sensible epistemological statement, even if it does not acknowledge the ways we find a world, for example, in ready-made languages.

Yet, Rorty’s case for worldmaking often goes beyond epistemological interests. Moral claims are advanced also. Note how he begins the first chapter of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*:

About two hundred years ago, the idea that truth was made rather than found began to take hold of the imagination of Europe. The French Revolution had shown that the whole vocabulary of social relations, and the whole spectrum of social institutions, could be replaced almost overnight. This precedent made utopian politics the rule rather than the exception among intellectuals. Utopian politics sets aside questions about both the will of God and the nature of man and dreams of creating a hitherto unknown form of society. (*CIS* 3)

seven, then you know something of relativism without the help of an introductory philosophy course. We are constantly referring to differing “points of view,” to the eccentric’s “own little world,” and to our—opposed to their—“way of life.” I am not arguing that the feud between philosophical realists and relativists is the result of taking ordinary language distinctions too seriously, though that may be part of the story. Mine is a less ambitious point: the present-day dispute can be viewed as the contest between two, somewhat distinct, entrenched vocabularies.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 7. Abbreviated *CIS*.

This passage captures the general ethos of Rorty's new book. He applauds the Western trajectory that replaced love of God with love of (scientific) truth, and then love of truth with love of ourselves (see *CIS* 22). This is the path of freedom. Formerly bound to truths beyond the visible world, we now are free to author our own truths. This conviction leads Rorty to claim that "freedom as the recognition of contingency" is "*the chief virtue of the members of a liberal society*" (*CIS* 46; my emphasis). Human solidarity, then, is "not a matter of sharing a common truth or a common goal but of sharing a common selfish hope, the hope that one's world—the little things around which one has woven into one's final vocabulary—will not be destroyed" (*CIS* 92).

Now there are many good things to be said of this line of thought. Emphasizing the contingency of knowledge and beliefs, practices and institutions may be a step toward releasing individuals from harmful superstitions and traditions. It may even encourage individuals to be more likely to criticize the status-quo, since no present state of affairs can claim to be beyond scrutiny because supported by Divine or Natural reason. I take this to be one of the chief moral lessons of world-making. Recognizing the contingency of our history and institutions, we may be more willing to entertain novel approaches to public and personal problems that would otherwise remain intractable. And this is the very benefit I have associated with Durkheim and Goodman's mild-mannered pragmatism. Moreover, awareness of the contingency of our problems could make us more aware of the contingency and, therefore, the limits of our solutions. We may learn that there are no final solutions. We may become practitioners of what Michael Walzer has called "exodus politics," a politics of continual reform ("a long series of decisions, backslidings, and reforms") while successfully avoiding "messianic politics," a politics of absolutized revolutions and once-and-for-all solutions.<sup>22</sup>

But there's reason to pause. Durkheim, I have said, shows the ways we make *and* find a world. He worries about the pragmatists when they say we make the world, and for them "the 'we' means the individual." This worry, for the most part, is misplaced. Pragmatism, I have argued, often highlights the interaction between individual creativity and social traditions. James, for example, writes that "new

truth... marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity."<sup>23</sup> And, as if responding to Durkheim, he continues, "the point I now urge you to observe particularly is the part played by the older truths. Failure to take account of it is the source of much of the unjust criticism leveled against pragmatism. Their influence is absolutely controlling."

Still, Durkheim's concern about pragmatism is not entirely unfounded. James occasionally sounds unduly subjectivistic, such as when he claims that "a new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock... When old truth grows, then, by new truth's addition, it is for subjective reasons."<sup>24</sup> And, at times, pragmatists have seemed overly infatuated with the individual's will-to-power, as if the only things hindering human happiness and progress were weak wills. Durkheim fears that the pragmatists have not attended sufficiently to the world found. And this is my concern about Rorty.

Rorty—patron of pragmatism and campaigner against unhelpful dualisms—claims to dismiss the difference between making and finding. In fact, he often champions the ethics of making and neglects the ethics of finding. I am not arguing, as does the philosopher Jenny Teichman, that Rorty's infatuation with making represents "nothing more or less than the tribal mores of teenage human males."<sup>25</sup> Unlike Teichman, I want to give Rorty a fair reading. He successfully articulates some of the ethical implications of making. But more attention to the ways of finding would have strengthened his case.

For example, note again the opening paragraph of his first chapter. He says that "The French Revolution had shown that the whole vocabulary of social relations, and the whole spectrum of social institutions, could be replaced almost overnight." The Revolution made room for utopian politics and its "dreams of creating a hitherto unknown form of society." But was the Revolution the beginning of something new or the continuation of something old? Was it the result of individual imaginations set free or social forces already in motion? And did the utopian politics set aside "questions about both the will of God and the nature of man" or were its dreams a result of some answers to these questions?

<sup>23</sup> James 35.

<sup>24</sup> James 36.

<sup>25</sup> Jenny Teichman, *The New York Times Book Review*, April 23, 1989: 30.2.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 16, 135-41, 144-49.



I am not looking for one-liner responses to the questions I just posed. The questions remind me of James's "Does the man go round the squirrel or not?"<sup>26</sup> There are as many good answers to these questions as there are good points of view. Mild-mannered pragmatism is willing to entertain many points of view. Rorty usually is. But his statement on the French Revolution illustrates his failure to explore the ways that new things, like revolutions, are connected with old things, like social traditions. He has failed to tell us about the ways we do *find* truth, objectivity, and knowledge.

This has made him a target for abuse. Teichman claims that, for Rorty, there is no objective difference "between cruelty and kindness, no such thing as human nature and human solidarity, no such thing as objective reason and no such thing as truth."<sup>27</sup> Saying that Rorty does not think there is such a thing as human solidarity is the only thing unequivocally false in her claim. The rest is ambiguous. The ambiguity springs from the term "objective." If by "objective" Teichman means something known in and of itself, independent of socially produced concepts (Durkheim) or entrenched vocabularies (Goodman and Hume), then her claim is mostly correct. If, on the other hand, "objective" refers to the capacity to make sound judgments, given everything we know, on what counts, for example, as a cruel or a kind act, then her claim is clearly false. On this account, Rorty thinks there is an objective difference between cruelty and kindness, and he thinks certain novelists can deepen our sensitivity to varieties of both. If Rorty had followed Durkheim's lead in describing the ways we find a world—a world outfitted with objectivity, truth, and knowledge—he might have averted misleading book reviews such as Teichman's. More important, he might have helped us understand some important features of the ethics of finding a world.

Worldmaking, if not sufficiently wed to the ways we find a world, could lead to outcomes different from those Rorty wants. It could, for example, lead to moral nihilism or to a form of moral relativism that maintains that it is impossible to judge or to be judged by a member of a foreign culture. It could fail to make clear the ways we are confronted with circumstances not of our own choosing; the ways we can learn of something new about ourselves by being attentive to those historical traditions that have shaped us; the ways the world found

<sup>26</sup> See James 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> Teichman, *New York Times Book Review*.

can make or remake us. Those who shun the world found are likely to miss its lessons. Rorty exalts authors who create self-made worlds. Yet, if there really are such authors, I suspect they risk becoming immune to transformation. Genuine worldmakers, like good listeners, have open, tutored hearts. They are disciplined in allowing the world found to talk back to them. Again, no metaphysical work is being done here. I am only reworking Durkheim's message: we belong to and are confronted by a world not of our own making.

A contingent world? In many ways, yes. A world that can be remade? Yes, to a great extent. Virtuous individuals felicitously navigate the juncture of the found and the made world. They struggle to know where change is required. They attempt to figure out which traditions are helpful, which are destructive. They find a world stocked with green emeralds, moral customs, and works of art. This world makes them. Their moral vision, artistic insight, and scientific know-how springs from the world found. Yet from this world they make new constructions. How do they *know* their new creations are better than those received? How can they discern the difference between moral progress and amoral (or immoral) change? They do the best they can, given the best beliefs available. What more could we ask of them? Again, we come up against the necessity of justifying rookies with veterans. This is a natural circularity. It is human. To attempt to escape it is unnatural. Rorty claims that "freedom as the recognition of contingency" is "*the chief virtue* of the members of a liberal society." But I would have thought that "the recognition of contingency" is not a virtue but simply one more description of the human condition, and that we need the virtues, such as *phronesis* and courage, in order to live a good life in the face of contingency, that is, in the absence of eternal, transcendent solutions.

Rorty thinks that human solidarity is "not a matter of sharing a common truth or a common goal but of sharing a common selfish hope, the hope that one's world—the little things around which one has woven into one's final vocabulary—will not be destroyed." I take this to mean that the protection of private space is a shared, common goal, and that it is sufficient for establishing solidarity. Durkheim, however, thinks solidarity requires more than a single common goal or hope. In an industrial age marked by increased individualism and the eclipse of many traditional communities and social practices, Durkheim reminds us that when we inhabit the modern world (or worlds) we still receive many shared truths and goals. We live in a public



world, a world not simply of our own, private making. Durkheim reminds us of those ties that bind us to each other and to a common past and shared future. This (indeterminate yet relatively steady) inheritance constitutes our solidarity. The rights and dignity of the individual is perhaps the most salient feature of our solidarity. But it is only one feature. Liberalism needs to be situated in a shared, moral context, lest it promote egoism instead of moral individualism.

#### IV

Durkheim and Goodman share a common problem and solution. The plurality of versions of worlds leads them to investigate the crucial role played by history and tradition, authority and entrenchment in various processes of finding and making a world. They follow Hume in reminding us of the thoroughly human — that is, situated — nature of knowledge. And they are both led to reject any scheme that would fundamentally sever knowledge in half, carving an absolute line between Natur- and Geisteswissenschaften, between science on the one hand and morality and art on the other. In *Ways of World Making*, Goodman says that “a major thesis of his book is 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, and thus that the philosophy of art should be conceived as an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology” (102; see also 140). And Durkheim, inquiring whether there is an essential difference between “value judgments and judgments of reality” concludes that “there is no difference in nature.”<sup>28</sup>

Durkheim and Goodman do not deny that there are differences between the various pursuits we call the sciences and those we call ethics or the arts. Dissimilar goals and problems, however, account for most of these differences, not dissimilar levels of objectivity or subjectivity. Objectivity and subjectivity have more to do with the degree of agreement or entrenchment than with what the Enlightenment understood as knowledge and opinion. Durkheim and Goodman scrap the notion that the sciences are distorted by social and historical elements. Durkheim, though it might as well have been Goodman, says in *Primitive Classifications*:

<sup>28</sup> Emile Durkheim, “Value Judgments and Judgments of Reality” (1911), in *Emile Durkheim: Sociology and Philosophy*, tr. D. F. Pocock (New York: Free Press, 1974) 95.

We now know what a multiplicity of elements make up the mechanism by virtue of which we construct, project, and localize... The faculties of definition, deduction, and induction are generally considered as immediately given in the constitution of the individual understanding... This conception of the matter was not at all surprising so long as the development of logical faculties was thought to belong simply to individual psychology, so long as no one had the idea of seeing in these methods of scientific thought veritable social institutions... (3)

Given the present, fierce polarization between worldmakers and worldfinders (sometimes known as relativists and realists), we should applaud Durkheim and Goodman for providing a middle way that champions human creativity while avowing the felt pressure of truth.<sup>29</sup> As mild-mannered pragmatists, they have held on to what is good and true in two opposing theories, and have enabled us to describe ourselves, epistemologically and morally, as both makers and finders.

<sup>29</sup> Again, the “pressure of truth” has nothing to do with the correspondence theory or with any other theory of truth, except that it explains, in part, why some scholars are so very concerned about such theories. The pressures of truth are those webs of constraints found in authority, entrenchment, and tradition, as discussed in the body of this essay.