The Power of Parsimony

Catherine Z. Elgin

Abstract: Extensionalism is often rejected on the grounds that it cannot explicate metaphor, fiction, indirect discourse, and ascriptions of propositional attitude. I argue that Nelson Goodman's extensionalism has the resources to explicate all these devices. But Goodman recognizes multiple modes of reference, whereas intensional theories recognize only one. So it is not obvious that his theory is more austere than its intensional rivals. What recommends Goodman's extensionalism, I contend, is not its ontological austerity so much as its flexibility and sensitivity to context.

Nelson Goodman is renowned for his parsimony. He eschews abstract entities and possible worlds. He countenances no meanings, propositions, intensions, or senses. Whatever is, he insists, is actual. Since we can refer only to what there is to be referred to, we can refer only to what is actual. This seems a remarkably level-headed philosophical stance. But such austerity is often considered fatal to the philosophy of language. For there are a variety of locutions that extensional theories seem too impoverished to handle. These include fictional, metaphorical, and indirect discourse. I will argue that the charge against Goodman is unfounded. Far from being a fatal weakness, Goodman's ontological parsimony is a source of strength. It allows for the construction of a comprehensive, extensional theory of reference that is more sensitive to contextual factors than its intensional rivals.

1

The problem raised by fiction is this: In extensional contexts, coextensive terms are intersubstitutable *salva veritate*. According to Goodman, all contexts are extensional. But even though fictional terms are coextensive, they are not in general freely interchangeable. The names `Don Quixote' and `King Lear' are coextensive, for the denotation of both terms is null. Nevertheless, we cannot substitute the term `Don Quixote' for the term `King Lear' in our discussions of literature. Evidently, the principle of extensionality breaks down in fictional contexts.

Intensional theories have the resources to deal with such difficulties. Even though the actual denotation of the terms `Don Quixote' and `King Lear' is null -- even though, that is, the names denote nothing in the actual world -- intensionalists such as David Lewis contend that they refer to people in other possible worlds [Lewis 1978]. Since the names refer to distinct people in the closest possible worlds where their denotation is nonnull, it is a mistake to identify Don Quixote with King Lear. And since, on such a construal, fictive discourse is intensional, terms that diverge in reference in other possible worlds are not intersubstitutable *salva veritate*. A more stringent substitution criterion -- perhaps sameness of sense, sameness of proposition, or sameness of reference in sufficiently proximate possible worlds -- is operative in such contexts. Other intensionalist accounts are also available. They contend that we understand fiction by focusing on the meanings rather than the referents of fictive terms, or by focusing on the content rather than the truth values of the propositions a

2

fictional work expresses. Obviously, no such construal is available to Goodman.

Indirect discourse and propositional attitude ascriptions give rise to similar difficulties. For coextensive terms are not normally intersubstitutable in such contexts. Suppose Gunter Abel asserts, `Goodman formulated the new riddle of induction'. Even if the new riddle of induction is in fact the most vexing problem in contemporary epistemology, we cannot report that Abel said that Goodman formulated the most vexing problem in contemporary epistemology. Nor can we ascribe to him the belief that Goodman formulated the most vexing problem in contemporary epistemology, although he plainly believes that Goodman formulated the new riddle of induction. Such contexts too are typically construed as intensional. Frege and his followers contend that the referents of terms in intensional contexts are the senses those terms bear in extensional contexts [Frege, 1892]. So terms in intensional contexts are intersubstitutable if and only if they bear the same sense. Other intensionalists, in much the same vein, take sameness of proposition to be the criterion of intersubstitutability in such contexts. Both evidently provide the resources for distinguishing between the (arguably correct) report that Abel said that Goodman formulated the latest enigma of induction and the (manifestly incorrect) report that he said that Goodman formulated the most vexing problem in contemporary epistemology. Since Goodman countenances neither senses nor propositions, he can accept no such explication.

In metaphor, a symbol that literally refers to one (sort of) thing is used to characterize another. When we say that Heinzmann dissected Goodman's argument, for example, we use a term that literally describes a biological technique to describe philosophical one. The application is not arbitrary. It is not an instance of coining a new term or introducing an ambiguity. Rather, the application of the term `dissect' in philosophy depends crucially on its application in biology. Theories of metaphor undertake to explain the nature of that dependence. Again, meaning is often invoked. When a term is used metaphorically, it is claimed, certain elements of its meaning are preserved while its reference shifts. Thus, it is because those elements of the meaning of the term `dissect' are retained when the term is used to refer to an explication that the usage is metaphorical.

To be sure, there is a good deal of controversy about which elements of meaning need to be preserved. But the conviction that metaphor involves meaning transfer is widespread, and not just among intensionalists. Donald Davidson, an avowed extensionalist, shares that conviction [Davidson, 1978]. Since he denies that there exist any meanings to transfer, he denies that there are metaphorical truths. The sentence `Heinzmann dissected Goodman's argument'  is, on his view, false, because strictly speaking only organisms are subject to dissection.  To understand metaphors, Davidson contends, we should look to psychology, not semantics.  For psychology can explain why obviously false sentences like `Heinzmann dissected Goodman's argument' and trivially true sentences like `Blood is thicker than water' are

suggestive.

Goodman disagrees. Unlike Davidson, he contends that some literally false sentences are true under their metaphorical interpretations [Goodman, 1968, pp. 68-71 and Goodman 1979]. The sentence `Heinzmann dissected Goodman's argument' is true, even though not literally true. Since he agrees with Davidson that there are no meanings to serve as vehicles for metaphorical transfer, he needs some other way to account for the dependence of the metaphorical on the literal.

Given the difficulties extensionalism faces and the readily available solutions intensionalism provides, Goodman's metaphysical austerity may seem perverse. It is not. Goodman refuses to countenance intensional entities -- meanings, propositions, possible worlds, and the like -- not out of an idiosyncratic fondness for desert landscapes, but because their criteria of individuation are apparently irredeemably obscure. This is hardly an unreasonable objection. But however well founded his qualms may be, the problem remains. If intensional entities are required for the explication of fictive, metaphorical and/or indirect discourse, extensionalism affords an inadequate basis for a philosophy of language, much less a general theory of symbols. The challenge then is to show that extensionalism has the resources to explicate such devices.

Quine ducks the challenge. Although the troublesome devices may be convenient or enjoyable in daily life and useful in embryonic research programs, he contends that they must be purged from the language of

mature science. They have, he says, no role in limning the true and ultimate structure of reality [Quine 1960, p. 221 and Quine 1978, pp. 161-162]. Since, he believes, it is only in the regimented, canonical notation of a mature science that questions of reference can be rigorously formulated, worries about the reference of constructions that do not appear in such a science are idle. For the constructions, being mere façons de parler, are devoid of ontological commitment. I have argued elsewhere that even mature science requires such constructions [Elgin, 1997, pp. 208-220]. If I'm right, eliminativism is not an option, even for Quine. It is clearly not an option for philosophers like Goodman whose interest in symbolic functioning extends well beyond the limits of ideal science.

Goodman then accepts the challenge. His response is twofold. First, although he insists that we can refer only to what is actual, he notes that there are a variety of actual things and actual ways of grouping things that intensional theories typically ignore. In particular, there are actual symbols -- pictures, descriptions, diagrams, and so forth. Often, he contends, when we seem to be referring to merely possible entities, we are really referring to actual pictures, descriptions, or other symbols, or are classifying actual, but perhaps unfamiliar entities in actual but nonstandard ways. Second, he contends that there are multiple modes of reference. So there are a variety of different ways to refer to what is actual [Goodman, 1968].

The members of any class, however motley, bear some resemblance to one another. Most such resemblances are of no interest whatsoever.

Although the members of the class containing a shoelace, a spiral galaxy, three strands of DNA, and the last chord of the Moonlight Sonata are alike by virtue of their membership in that class, their resemblance is surely a matter of indifference. It is pointless to label their common feature, since we will probably never care about it again. We devise systems of classification to label likenesses that matter. There are many such systems, for what matters is a function of our interests and these are wide ranging and ever changing. Among the systems we devise are systems for classifying symbols. Many do not depend on what the symbols denote. We readily classify works by genre, style, medium, and school. And we learn to recognize the genres, styles, media, and schools of the works we encounter. We also group symbols together on the basis of their ostensible subject matter. We do so directly, Goodman maintains, just as we directly classify some works as sonnets and others as theorems. We need no more investigate whether a description denotes griffins to decide whether it is a griffin-description than we need to investigate whether a story denotes short things to decide whether it is a short story. In calling something a griffin-description, Goodman contends, we are concerned with what kind of description it is, not with what (if anything) it denotes. A phrase is griffin-description then because the predicate `griffin-description' denotes it, not because it denotes griffins.  And the predicate `griffin-description' describes it even though it does not describe a griffin.

In ordinary usage, Goodman contends, terms like `picture' and `description' are ambiguous. Something can be called a description (or

picture) of a giraffe either on the basis of what it denotes or on the basis of what sort of a symbol it is. Goodman disambiguates, reserving the *-of* construction for denotational use, and introducing schemata, such as `p-picture' and `p-description', for classificatory use. A griffin-description is not a description *of* a griffin, for there exists no griffin for it to be a description of. And a picture *of* a giraffe may fail to be a giraffe-picture if, for example, the beast is so well camouflaged that it blends completely into the foliage.

Understanding a fiction is not, Goodman believes, a matter of understanding what it denotes, but of understanding what it is -- that is, what labels denote it. This is the case when we're concerned with the ostensible subject matter of the work as well as when we're concerned with the style. And understanding a fictive term like `Don Quixote' involves recognizing that it instantiates a range of p-descriptions -- `Don-Quixote-description', `benighted-knight-errant-description',  `tilter-at-windmills-description', and so on. The terms `Don Quixote' and `King Lear' are not intersubstitutable in discussions of fiction then because the two terms do not instantiate the same range of p-labels. The reason for failure of intersubstitutability in such contexts thus is not semantic but pragmatic. The substitution of coextensive terms that do not instantiate the relevant p-labels would preserve truth values, but would not foster the interests our discussions of fiction seek to serve.

The importance of p-labels extends well beyond the realm of fiction. We gain an enormous amount of information via symbols. To do so we must

understand what p-labels the symbols we encounter instantiate. We recognize, for example, a variety of descriptions as Bosnia-descriptions and take them to be descriptions of Bosnia. When we discover that the news reports we have been reading are inaccurate, we conclude that the Bosnia-descriptions in question were not all descriptions of Bosnia.

P-labels figure significantly in science as well. Scientists often venture hypotheses about the existence of hitherto undetected entities. Contemporary physicists, for example, hypothesize that positrons exist. These hypotheses are not idle remarks. Nor are they speculations about something we know not what. Rather, they are substantive conjectures that are articulated, elaborated, and integrated into theory so that evidence for their truth or falsity can be sought. Although physicists do not know whether positrons exist, they have formulated a range of robust positron-descriptions. Indeed, without such descriptions, it is hard to see how the search for positrons could be carried out, for the scientists would not know what they were looking for. There is, of course, no assurance that the search will be successful. Whether positrons exist is a question of fact. But because they have formulated substantive, informative positron-descriptions, physicists are in a position to recognize positrons if they encounter them. For they can tell whether the evidence their experiments disclose answers to the positron-descriptions they endorse.

Griffin-descriptions need not, of course, contain the word `griffin'. Nor need positron-descriptions contain the word `positron'. Whether a

description qualifies as a griffin-description or a positron-description depends on how it functions in context and on how its functions are classified. The very same description might easily qualify as a griffin-description in one context and not in another. Classification is, of course, constrained by precedents -- some of them fairly complex. Even if a description contained the word `griffin', it would probably not be considered a griffin-description if it diverged sharply and unaccountably from the griffin-descriptions we unhesitatingly accept as such. This does not mean that the classification is static. For each new symbol that is classified as a griffin-description can shift the weight of precedent against which future candidates are to be assessed. This is what enables fictional characters to develop over the course of a novel, mythical figures to evolve, and scientists to refine their conceptions of entities whose existence is still in doubt.

It might seem that Goodman's device is just a nominalist gloss on essential definition. If we require necessary and sufficient conditions to determine whether a description qualifies as a griffin-description, the claim to have evaded essentialism rings hallow. But, Goodman contends, we require no such thing. Just as we can typically tell whether something instantiates the label `chair' without knowing necessary and sufficient conditions for being a chair,  we can typically tell whether something instantiates the label `griffin-description' without knowing necessary and sufficient conditions for being a griffin-description. New applications of both labels are guided by precedent -- previous applications that we consider

unproblematic. Both allow for undecidable cases. An artifact may be such that it is neither clearly a chair nor clearly not a chair. A characterization may be such that it is neither clearly a griffin-description nor clearly not a griffin-description.   Verdicts reached in such cases are products of stipulation, not discovery. Nor are descriptions peculiarly hard to classify. It is likely to be far easier to tell whether a symbol is a positron-description than to tell whether its referent is a positron.

Goodman himself does not venture explications of indirect discourse or propositional attitude ascriptions. But Israel Scheffler and I have drawn on his work to provide extensional explications of these constructions. Here too p-labels are crucial. In his repudiation of analyticity, Goodman argues that coextensive terms *p* and *q* inevitably differ in meaning, since p-descriptions and p-pictures are not all and only q-descriptions and q-pictures [Goodman 1949 and Goodman, 1953]. Although, for example, all and only griffins are centaurs, it is not the case that all and only griffin-pictures are centaur-pictures. So the words `griffin' and `centaur' are not synonymous. Neither are the words `bachelor' and `unmarried man'.   For even though all bachelors are unmarried men, it is not the case that all bachelor-descriptions are unmarried-man-descriptions.   Nevertheless, Goodman recognizes that coextensive terms *p* and *q* may be more or less alike in meaning. Coextensive terms *p* and *q* are alike in meaning to the extent that compounds obtained by combining other words with *p* are coextensive with the compounds obtained by combining the very same words with *q.*

Goodman calls such compounds *parallel compounds*. Unfortunately, this yields only an intralinguistic criterion of likeness of meaning. However alike the meanings of `chien' and `dog' may seem preanalytically, the combinations that result from replacing `dog' with `chien' in phrases like `owner of a dog',  `dog house' , `dog-description' belong to no language or symbol system. Hence they have no extension.

Drawing on a device introduced by Scheffler [Scheffler, 1979, p. 35], Wolfgang Heydrich remedies this shortcoming [Heydrich, 1993]. Although all parallel compounds figure in Goodman's criterion of likeness of meaning, most are so well behaved that they can safely be ignored. If all and only creatures with hearts are creatures with kidneys, then all and only mothers of creatures with hearts are mothers of creatures with kidneys. We need not then worry about phrases like `mother of'.  But even if all and only creatures with hearts are creatures with kidneys, it may fail to be the case that all and only creature-with-heart-descriptions are creature-with-kidneys-descriptions. When we combine coextensive terms with `-picture', `-description', `-representation', and the like, divergences in meaning emerge.

Scheffler notes that we do not always use denoting terms denotively. If we go to a museum, we find pictures with captions like `Woman with a Lute' or `Water Lilies'. The caption `Woman with a Lute' does not, of course refer to a woman with a lute.  Rather, it refers to  a woman-with-a-lute-picture. When we use the phrase `Woman With a Lute' to refer to that picture, Scheffler says, we use the phrase mention-selectively. Mention-selection

then is a mode of reference by which a symbol refers not to its denotation, but to mentions thereof. Heydrich recommends that rather than relying on parallel compounds to settle questions of likeness of meaning, we appeal to mention-selection. Then coextensive terms are alike in meaning to the extent that they agree in mention selection as well. Roughly, coextensive terms p and q are alike in meaning to the extent that p-representations (that is, p-pictures, p-descriptions, and the like) are q-representations and vice versa. The terms `bachelor' and `unmarried man' thus are more alike in meaning than the terms `centaur' and `griffin'.

This conception of likeness of meaning provides the basis for a flexible, context sensitive notion of paraphrase. One expression qualifies as a paraphrase of another if the relevant p-labels align. Since many, even if not all, bachelor-descriptions are unmarried-man-descriptions, the term `bachelor' is frequently a reasonable paraphrase for the term `unmarried man'. Since few, if any, griffin-descriptions are centaur-descriptions, the term `griffin' is unlikely to be an acceptable paraphrase for the term `centaur'.

With a viable notion of paraphrase, we can explicate indirect discourse and propositional attitude ascriptions. To do so, we invoke p-labels that classify not pictures and descriptions, but utterances and inscriptions. According to Scheffler [Scheffler, 1954], a statement like

1. Abel said that Goodman posed the grue paradox.

should be explicated as

2.   Abel   uttered   some   that-Goodman-posed-the-grue-paradox-utterance.

Abel's remark need not have been a replica of

    Goodman posed the grue paradox.

He might, for example, have uttered the words

    Goodman invented the new riddle of induction.

Indeed, his remark need not even have been in English. All that is required

for the truth of 1 is that Abel made some remark that is correctly

characterized as a that-Goodman-posed-the-grue-paradox-utterance.   A

multiplicity of syntactically divergent utterances in a multiplicity of

languages satisfy that requirement. My explication of belief ascriptions,

although slightly more complicated, follows along the same general lines

[Elgin, 1985]. Such explications are agreeably austere in their ontological

commitments. In indirect discourse, on Scheffler's account, we commit

ourselves only to the existence of speakers and utterances (or writers and

inscriptions). Surely there is nothing metaphysically objectionable about

them. Moreover, p-labels provide the sort of flexible, context-sensitive

mechanism for classifying symbols that indirect discourse and ascriptions of

propositional attitude require. For in such constructions, the standards on

acceptable paraphrase vary considerably, and often diverge from sameness

of meaning, however that may be construed.

    I can report Abel's words,

    Nelson Goodman formulated the new riddle of induction

as

   Abel said that Goodman invented the grue paradox,

not because the words

   Nelson Goodman formulated the new riddle of induction

and the words

   Goodman invented the grue paradox

have the same meaning (they pretty clearly don't), but because we know and know that Abel knows that the grue paradox is the new riddle of induction. In this case, common knowledge underwrites the classification of Abel's remark as a that-Goodman-invented-the-grue-paradox-utterance. In other contexts, it might not. If, for example, the new riddle of induction is not standardly called a *paradox* in Germany, we might be reluctant to construe his remark to his students as saying that Goodman posed the grue paradox. The flexibility of p-labeling enables us to have it both ways. In the one context we can invoke a label with rather generous boundaries, in the other, one with narrower ones.

   Nevertheless, Donald Davidson has raised an objection that, if sound, would discredit this type of explication. He argues that if the sort of account Scheffler provides were correct, language would be unlearnable [Davidson, 1965].   His argument is this: Any sentence in the language can be embedded in a that-clause of indirect discourse.

   Abel said that Goodman invented the grue paradox,

   Cometti said that the sun is shining,

15

Schwartz said that Hegel is bewildering,

and so on. There are infinitely many sentences in a language. Hence there are infinitely many candidates for embedding in that-clauses. This means, on Scheffler's account, that there are infinitely many instances of the schema *that-p-utterance*. Moreover, each of those instances is a one place predicate and is semantically independent of every other. If this is so, Davidson contends, the language contains infinitely many semantic primitives, one for each substitution instance of the schema. But our minds are finite. So we cannot learn a language consisting of infinitely many semantic primitives. Hence, if Scheffler is right, language is unlearnable. Since my explication of propositional attitude ascriptions makes use of the same device, it makes language unlearnable as well. But, Davidson points out, language is not unlearnable. Therefore, he concludes, explications like Scheffler's are wrong.

Clearly, if Davidson is right, the sort of explication that Scheffler and I propose is hopeless. But, as Schwartz has argued, Davidson's argument is based on assumptions that we should not grant. `The notion of a semantic primitive for a natural language is not a clear one,' Schwartz notes [Schwartz, 1978, p. 191].[1] We can readily say what qualifies as a primitive under some formalization of a language. But every language admits of multiple formalizations, with different terms serving as primitives. And nothing is primitive or derived apart from or prior to all formalizations. Since we don't learn a natural language by mastering a list of primitive terms and

_____

1See also [Scheffler, 1986, pp. 3-5 and Elgin, 1984].

combination rules, the semantic status of symbols as primitive or derived may make no difference to their acquisition.

The crucial worry, Schwartz argues, is not infinity, but arbitrariness. If we seek to master a list containing, say, the words, `shoe,' `ink,' `cow,' and so on, we need to learn each word separately.  The words on the list are arbitrary relative to one another `in the sense that learning one gives no substantial bias or purchase toward learning' others [Schwartz 1978, pp. 196-197]. But not all semantically independent symbols are in this sense arbitrary with respect to each other. There are symbol systems whose members are so related that once we have mastered some symbols, we have the resources for figuring out how to interpret others. For example, once we have learned to recognize impressionist hay-stack-pictures, ballet-dancer-pictures, and cathedral-pictures, we have little difficulty interpreting other impressionist pictures we encounter. The pictures are semantically independent of one another. And the stylistic features we rely on fall far short of rules. Still they constitute a base from which projection is relatively straightforward. Similarly, I would urge, having understood the metaphorical application of some terms, we readily understand the metaphorical application of others. We understand the term `embryonic' when it is applied metaphorically to research programs, because we are familiar with the use of `mature' to denote highly developed sciences. Here again, there is no question of semantic rules. But there are precedents that guide interpretation.

17

Likewise, although the various instances of the that-p-utterance schema are semantically independent of each other, they are not arbitrary relative to each other. We need not learn each predicate separately, for they form a pattern. From each sentential utterance a that-p-utterance predicate can be formed. And the various instances of a given that-p-utterance are sentences that qualify as paraphrases of the sentence that replaces *p* in the schema. This does not yield a semantic rule for the interpretation of the predicates, or a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for their instantiation. But it, along with a few examples that serve as precedents, enables us to proceed effectively.

In all such cases, the method is inductive. It is a matter of projecting from a limited class of cases. And induction, as we know, is a risky business. Still, it is not doomed to failure. So we ought not conclude from the fact that a learning strategy involves induction that the material it concerns cannot be learned. A language with the resources for constructing semantically independent p-labels -- even an infinite number of them -- is learnable. For we can master the technique for constructing those labels on the basis of a finite, indeed quite limited, number of examples.

Goodman does not countenance natural kinds. Any extension is as real as any other. To be sure, the vast majority of extensions are semantically unmarked. So we lack the resources to characterize them. Normally this does not matter. For those extensions are of no interest. Sometimes, however, we want to recognize membership in a previously

unmarked class. One way to do so is through metaphor. In using a term metaphorically, we effect a reorganization of a domain by applying a familiar label to a new and often otherwise unlabelled individual or class. The metaphorical label then denotes the individual or the members of that class. So if we say of a member that it is a member, we say something true. When John McPhee called a tennis player's forehand Wagnerian, he imported a scheme that literally characterizes music into the realm of sport. He thereby effected a reorganization of the athletic realm, grouping together athletic performances in ways that no literal label does. Moves in a wide variety of games fall under the metaphorical predicate `Wagnerian'. Some tennis strokes are among them, most are not. McPhee could, presumably, have effected the reorganization he wanted by coining a new literal term. But the metaphor does more. Besides grouping together a variety of instances of athletic prowess, it likens them to grand opera. It enables us to discern affinities between the athletic and operatic realms.

The metaphor effects a joint exemplification of a constellation of features that the literal and metaphorical referents of the term share. Both Wagnerian operas and Wagnerian athletic performances are, for example, grandiose, intense, seemingly inevitable -- if slightly excessive -- manifestations of primordial power. Labeling the tennis stroke Wagnerian highlights such features, and brings them to the fore. The constellation of features a metaphor exemplifies is apt to be semantically unmarked [Glucksberg and Keysar 1990]. Even if we have words for some of the

elements, we typically lack a literal term for the constellation as a whole. So the metaphor, by exemplifying that constellation, affords epistemic access to it. It enables us to discern an intricate pattern of affinities that cuts across disparate realms.

Metaphor, as Goodman construes it, is a complex mode of reference. It reorganizes a domain, enable us to characterize likenesses and differences that available literal terminology cannot. Since metaphorical terms genuinely denote the items they metaphorically apply to, metaphorical sentences can be true. When McPhee said, `At the age of twelve, Graebner already possessed a Wagnerian forehand', he said something true, for the tennis stroke in question belongs to the extension that the metaphorical term `Wagnerian' picks out. And metaphor likens elements of the metaphorical domain to elements of the literal domain by effecting the joint exemplification of features they share. By combining denotation and exemplification then, metaphors afford semantic and epistemic access to hitherto unnoticed affinities both within and across realms.

As the foregoing discussion shows, Goodman's theory of symbols has the resources to accommodate so-called `intensional' contexts. Does this mean that intensional and extensional theories are equally tenable? Obviously philosophers who refuse to countenance entities whose criteria of individuation are obscure have reason to favor Goodmanian extensionalism. But what about philosophers who lack such qualms? It might seem that

Ockham's razor still gives us reason to prefer Goodman's theory. If it is possible to account for the phenomena that concern us without adducing additional entities -- senses, possible world, propositions, or whatever -- then to introduce such items into one's ontology is to multiply entities without necessity. Surely we should avoid doing that. But the issue is not so clear-cut as this argument might suggest. For there is a tradeoff between metaphysical and semantic commitments. The semantic resources of intensional theories are sparse, denotation being the only primitive semantic relation. Such theories compensate for semantic austerity by introducing into their ontology an abundance of abstract or other worldly entities to serve as denotata. Goodman, on the other hand, recognizes two primitive semantic relations -- denotation and exemplification -- and constructs a variety of complex modes of reference out of them. He therefore can get by with a more restricted ontology. Goodman then multiplies semantic commitments; intensional theorists multiply ontological commitments. It is not obvious that multiplying the one is any better or worse than multiplying the other. It seems to me that Goodman's theory remains the more austere, but the matter is controversial, for comparisons are not straightforward. Ockham's razor, I suggest, does not unequivocally settle the debate.

The strongest reason for favoring Goodman's theory over its intensionalist rivals is that it accommodates the flexibility and context sensitivity of fictional, indirect, and metaphorical discourse. Even if we countenance the entities they recognize, its rivals do not.

Intensional theories take sameness of meaning to provide the criterion of paraphrase needed for indirect discourse and propositional attitude ascriptions. But we regularly and, it seems, rightly demand either more or less than that. If, for example, Bill is unaware that the terms `vixen' and `female fox' have the same meaning, then it is apt to be wrong to report his statement `I saw a vixen' as `Bill said that he saw a female fox'. And if he thinks the term `vixen' denotes young foxes, it may be right to report his statement as `Bill said that he saw a young fox'. Intensional theories cannot sanction such reports, for the meaning of a term is supposed to be what it is, whatever anyone thinks. And according to such theories, in indirect discourse, meaning must be preserved. But Goodman's theory can do justice to Bill's remark by recognizing that in the context in question the term `vixen' is not a female-fox-description, but is a young-fox-description.

Criteria for paraphrase also vary in fictional contexts. In some contexts, for example, the term `wizard' is interchangeable with the term `sorcerer'; in others, it is not. But, it seems, either the two terms have the same meaning or they do not. Either they denote the same things in the nearest possible worlds where their denotation is nonnull or they do not. Intensional theories are evidently too rigid to do justice to such cases. Goodman's theory easily accommodates them. In some contexts the term `sorcerer' is a wizard-description; in others, it is not. By looking carefully at how the symbols function, we can learn to tell the contexts apart.

Even if we countenance meanings, we must recognize that

22

metaphorical likening is not always a matter of meaning transfer.   The term `green' is sometimes a metaphor for health, likening the metaphorical subject to hearty plants. Sometimes it is a metaphor for youth, likening the subject to unripe fruits. Sometimes it is a metaphor for illness, likening its referent to the complexion of a victim of sea sickness. Knowing the meaning of the word `green' does not enable us to tell which metaphorical interpretation to give the term. Nor does it tell us why one word should be capable of bearing such divergent metaphorical interpretations. Goodman's account does better, since it does not insist that there must be a unique vehicle for metaphorical transfer.   Any shared features that the metaphor renders salient can serve as the bridge linking the two domains. Since the salience may be peculiar to a particular work and be contextually induced, the same term may effect a likening to different metaphorical referents across a variety of divergent routes.

Goodman's   account   accommodates   the   flexibility   and   context sensitivity of actual language

use. It does not supply rules of interpretation. This may be disappointing. But it is not a defect of the theory. Interpretation, Goodman insists, is not a matter of rote application of antecedently specified rules.   Rather, in language   as   in   other   symbol   systems,   interpretation   is   a   matter   of understanding how symbols function.   This involves grasping, relating, distinguishing, connecting, associating, dissociating. The list seems endless. The functions a single symbol performs may be intricate, subtle, and multi-

faceted. Or they may be simple, crude, and direct. Indeed, the same symbol may perform different functions in different contexts. The more understanding we have of symbol systems and their contexts, the richer and righter our interpretations are apt to be. But there is no hope of reducing the quest for understanding to a routine for applying antecedently specified rules.

Goodman's parsimony, I suggest, is to be valued not mainly for the stark beauty of the nominalism it underwrites -- although that nominalism is undeniably beautiful. Rather it is to be valued because it provides the flexibility and sensitivity to do justice to the ways symbols of all sorts function.

REFERENCES

DAVIDSON, D.

    1965   Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages, *Proceedings of the 1964 International*

        Congress for Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science (Amsterdam: North   Holland), 383-394.

    1978   What Metaphors Mean, *Critical Inquiry* 5, 31-47.

ELGIN, C.

    1984   Representation, Comprehension, and Competence, *Social Research* 51, 905-925.

    1985   Translucent Belief, *Journal of Philosophy* 92, 74-91.

1997   *Considered Judgment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 208-220.

FREGE, G.

1892   Uber Sinn und Bedeutung, *Zeitschrift fur Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100,   25-50.

GLUCKSBERG, S AND KEYSAR, B.

1990   Understanding Metaphorical Comparisons: Beyond Similarity, *Psychological Review*   97, 3-18.

GOODMAN, N.

1949   On Likeness of Meaning, *Analysis* 10, 1-7.

1953   On Some Differences About Meaning, *Analysis* 13, 90-96.

1968   *Languages of Art,* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1968), pp. 68-71.

1979   Metaphor as Moonlighting, *Critical Inquiry* 6, 125-130.

HEYDRICH, W.

1993   A Reconception of Meaning, *Synthese* 95, 77-94.

LEWIS, D.

1978   Truth in Fiction, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, 37-46.

QUINE, W. V.

1960   *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 221,

1978   Postscript on Metaphor, *Critical Inquiry* 5, 161-162.

SCHEFFLER, I.

1954   An Inscriptional Approach to Indirect Quotation, *Analysis* 14, 83-90.

1979   *Beyond the Letter* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 35.

1986   *Inquiries* (Indianapolis: Hackett), 3-5,

SCHWARTZ, B.

1978   Infinite Sets, Unbounded Competences, and Models of Mind, *Perception and*

Cognition: *Issues in the Foundations of Psychology,* Minnesota Studies in the

Philosophy of   Science, IX, 191.