

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art
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Walton, "Are Representations Symbols?"

I.

*Representational works seem to have semantic properties, and so also seem to employ symbols of some kind. But, Walton argues against the view that representations (in general, or *all* representations) are symbols. (Walton's chief target is the philosopher Nelson Goodman.)

--Walton will focus on representation by depiction.

--'Symbol' is a term with some meat to it:

"In calling representations "symbols" Goodman clearly means to suggest that they are importantly analogous to other symbols, e.g. linguistic ones, in particular that both have a fundamental "denotative" function." (349)

II.

*Terms: representation_q, *P*-representation, and matching.

--Matching is neither necessary nor sufficient for representation_q.

--What determines representation_q, then? Walton considers 4 possibilities, on p. 351: artistic intention, causal relations, titles and other conventional signs, and the kind of representation.

III.

*All representations_q denote, and *therefore* qualify as symbols.

--But not all symbols denote (e.g., not all linguistic expressions denote), so why think that non-denoting representations are not symbols?

--Walton's example of non-denotative (and not-*attempting-to-be*-denotative) bison-depictions. These depictions are representations.

--Walton makes a very important distinction between literary and pictorial representation, in the last paragraph of this section.

IV.

*Maybe here's a way to make all representation representation_q—admit possible beings as the objects of denotation.

--*Even granting the ontology*, Walton holds that this won't do. His objections start on the right hand column, p. 353.

(One problem: Matching doesn't fix denotation, so what fixes denotation for fictional works?)

(Another problem: Some fictions represent impossibilities—things that exist in no possible world. Think of Escher's fictional worlds.)

V.

*The move from possible worlds to fiction worlds doesn't help matters any. These fictional worlds would simply be generated directly by the fictions (with guaranteed perfect matching), ruling out the very possibility of misrepresentation. But this *possibility* is necessary for representation_q.

“(But the novel neither misrepresents Ahab nor represents him correctly; it *makes* him as he is.)” (355)

VI.

*Representation shouldn't be understood in terms of other semantic relations, such as matching, either. Walton compares representations to linguistic predicates, but notes the following difference:

“The fundamental function of representation thus is not to *express* propositions, but rather to make them make-believedly true. This is a function which predicates do not have (although novels and poems containing them do). And the occasional use of representations as predicates is quite incidental to it.” (356)