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Philosophy of the Social Sciences 1991 21: 175

DOI: 10.1177/004839319102100202

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Truth in Interpretation

The Case of Psychoanalysis

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This article explores and attempts to resolve some issues that arise when psychoanalytic explanations are construed as a type of historical or narrative explanation. The chief problem is this: If one rejects the claim of narratives to verisimilitude, this appears to divorce the notion of explanation from that of truth. The author examines, in particular, Donald Spence's attempt to deal with the relation of narrative explanations and truth. In his critique of Spence's distinction between narrative truth and historical truth, the author develops some suggestions regarding the role of truth in narrative explanations.

The business of the analysis is to secure the best possible psychological conditions for the functions of the ego; with that it has discharged its task.

—Sigmund Freud (1964, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable")

Yet interpretations work—and perhaps that is the greatest puzzle.

—Donald Spence (1982, Narrative Truth and Historical Truth)

Discussion of narrative as a (perhaps the) characteristic form of psychoanalytic explanation has become increasingly common.¹ One reason for this approach's appeal is that this type of explanation meshes nicely with the paradigmatic form of psychoanalytic reporting—the case history. Yet while those advocating the use of narratives to explain are quick to cite the pervasiveness of this form, there exists as yet no way of linking narratives to other, more fully explicated, forms of explanation. There is, in other words, no accounting as yet

I would like to thank Larry Davis for his help, via vigorous disagreement, with this article. I have benefited as well from comments by anonymous referees for this journal.

Philosophy of the Social Sciences, Vol. 21 No. 2, June 1991 175-195
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for how narratives *explain*. The pervasiveness of the form does not obviate the need to assess the logic and limits of such explanations.²

For the present purposes, I let the phrase "narrative explanation" describe work in, say, history, anthropology, and psychoanalysis, which does not fit philosophic models of scientific explanation. The specific issue regarding narrative explanations which this article addresses centers on the relation between the use of narrative in psychoanalysis and truth. The problem arises because while it is recognized that there are different modes of emplotting (to use Hayden White's term) a narrative (e.g., as a tragedy or a comedy), modes of emplotment are neither true nor false. Events have no intrinsic character to which narratives must conform; it is the narrative structure that defines events and their salient characteristics. In consequence, there is no point to asking after the verisimilitude of a narrative.³

Yet to suggest that narrative explanations in psychoanalysis make no claim to truth raises obvious questions. For, one might plausibly ask, how can a concern with explanation be divorced from a commitment to truth? It is an odd science indeed which declares that the truth of its account does not matter. More generally, if narratives have not truth value, how can they possibly be explanatory?

One way of responding to these questions is to argue that a narrative psychoanalytic explanation has its own *special* canons of truth, a canon which distinguishes the truth of a narrative from any notion of the verisimilitude of that narrative. Such an account finds an advocate in the work of Donald Spence (1982, 1983, 1986). Spence maintains that an incompatibility exists between what he takes to be the usual standard of truth and a notion of truth relevant to interpretation in psychoanalysis. The speculative nature of psychoanalytic constructions and interpretations, he believes, calls for a unique canon of evaluation.

One type of problem discussed, for example, is the lack of direct evidence for events on which interpretations may be based. Freud's insistence that the Wolf Man witnessed his parent's copulating *a tergo* is a case in point here. Problems arise as well, however, due to the many distortions to which perception and memory are subject. Numerous studies by social psychologists and others attest to how social factors shape perception; there are no neutral perceptions by which to arbitrate claims regarding what "really" happened. Given these and related problems, Spence argues for a radically contextualized notion of truth he terms "narrative truth."

In what follows, I review Spence's position and some difficulties charged to it. Against Spence, I argue that his notion of narrative truth is inconsistent with his own understanding of psychoanalysis and is not required by the logic of narrative explanations. I offer an account of truth and evidence in psychoanalysis consistent with how these terms are generally understood in the philosophical context to which Spence subscribes. Resolving the problems internal to Spence's account answers, as well, some key questions which critics raise about the role of truth in formulating narrative explanations.⁴

I.

Adolph Grünbaum (1980) has trenchantly criticized the claim made by Freud and many later psychoanalysts that interpretations "tally with what is real"; indeed, the claim is one on which Freud insists.⁵ Yet despite his conviction that only true interpretations and constructions are therapeutically efficacious, Freud (1964b) voiced serious doubts as to whether evidence generally suffices to vouchsafe that interpretations and constructions do indeed correspond with the past "as it actually was":

The path that starts from the analyst's construction ought to end in the patient's recollection; but it does not always lead so far. Quite often we do not succeed in bringing the patient to recollect what has been repressed. Instead of that, if the analysis is carried out correctly, we produce in him an assured conviction of the truth of the construction which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory. The problem of what the circumstances are in which this occurs and how it is possible that what appears to be an incomplete substitute should nevertheless produce a complete result—all this is matter for a later enquiry. (pp. 265-66)

Recent theoretical work, moreover, pushes in a direction which surely would have appalled Freud. Spence, for one, argues at length that for purposes of securing "the best possible psychological conditions for the function of the ego," assured conviction alone suffices. Contra Freud, Spence claims that constructions and interpretations need only possess what he terms "narrative truth."

Spence's "narrative truth" contrasts with "historical truth," a position he deems untenable. Historical truth requires that all efficacious constructions be reconstructions, recountings of an analysand's past

as it actually happened. "Historical truth is time-bound and is dedicated to the strict observance of correspondence rules; our aim is to come as close as possible to what 'really' happened" (1982, 32, see also 27). A statement is historically true if and only if it corresponds to events *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*.

Spence raises a wide variety of objections to the belief that it is possible or plausible that one has such access to past events (e.g., the fallibility of memory), even for paradigm cases of adult eyewitness reports. But the primary epistemological liability which Spence identifies concerns the analytic process itself. On the one side, the very act of putting perceptions into words, he argues, necessarily involves changing the objects of perception. But difficulties do not reside with the narrator of events alone; Spence also examines how listening imposes its own order on what is said. This order is inevitably and unavoidably prey to the listener's idiosyncrasies.

For Spence, historical truths are brute facts. Narratives give them a connection which is not merely chronological. The process of presenting a narrative about one's past requires identifying what events are significant and why. The problem is not that reports of the analysand or the listening of the analyst are subject to some special bias; rather, the problem resides precisely in the selection which occurs in the very processes of speaking and hearing. Communication follows the model of the children's game of telephone, with the critical exception that there is no certifying, in the actual process, some message as *the original*.

Spence rejects any claim of constructions and interpretations to historical truth. He is a skeptic; he doubts that we can know with certainty what has happened. However, his very way of posing the issue, that is, as a skeptical problem, presupposes the legitimacy of his contrast between some determinate historical truth and our narrative about it.

Since historical truth is beyond reach, what then is the touchstone of inquiry into an analysand's past? Spence resolves his skeptical puzzles with his notion of narrative truth. Since the operant standard for determining if a statement is true cannot be its ascertained correspondence to historical fact, the criterion becomes, instead, how a statement fits a history constructed in the course of an analytic encounter. In Spence's (1982) view,

Narrative truth can be defined as the criterion we use to decide when a certain experience has been captured to our satisfaction; it depends

on continuity and closure and the extent to which the fit of the pieces takes on an aesthetic finality. Narrative truth is what we have in mind when we say that such and such is a good story, that a given explanation carries conviction, that *one* solution to a mystery must be true. Once a given construction has acquired narrative truth, it becomes just as real as any other kind of truth; this new reality becomes a significant part of the psychoanalytic cure. (p. 31)

Narrative truth relies on no standard other than what the process of constructing a psychoanalytic narrative itself imposes.

The concept of narrative truth collapses distinctions between mere facts and narrations connecting them. Freud, for his part, sharply distinguishes between interpretation and construction; more recent usage blurs the distinction (see, e.g., Greenacre 1975). Yet even Freud's (1964b) model for a construction in analysis acknowledges that, in practice, any distinction between a narrative of events and historical truth is extremely problematic:

'Interpretation' applies to something that one does to some single element of the material, such as an association or a parapraxis. But it is a 'construction' when one lays before the subject of the analysis a piece of his early history that he has forgotten, in some such way as this: 'Up to your *n*th year you regarded yourself as the sole and unlimited possessor of your mother; then came another baby and brought you grave disillusionment. . . . Your feelings towards your mother became ambivalent, your father gained a new importance for you,' . . . and so on. (p. 261)

Freud included both verifiable historical events in the usual sense (e.g., a birth) and affective states within his model construction. He clearly considered each a distinct kind of historical truth (p. 261), difficulties of verification notwithstanding.

Spence (1983) sidesteps epistemological niceties concerning the relative status of births and feelings qua events. The criterion of truth results from what he terms "narrative persuasion"; if an interpretation or construction integrates well with an analysand's history as analyst and analysand understand it, and so contributes to the analytic process, then the interpretation or construction is true:

Certain kinds of interpretations—perhaps the majority—can never be validated because they represent a certain view of the patient's life which has no confirmable referent in reality. But to the extent that they become convincing and seem to explain a piece of the patient's life, they become true. . . . If the narrative fills a long-standing gap in the story the patient tells about himself which continues to mesh with new pieces of experience, it acquires narrative truth. (p. 466)

Spence tries to hedge the extreme relativism implied by his claim that statements "become true" by virtue of narrative persuasion by insisting that "the story must not only be persuasive—it must also be open to continuous validation" (p. 466). A satisfactory narrative must "continue to mesh with new pieces of experience."

Does the demand for continuous validation block the slide, in Spence's scheme of explanation, into complete relativism? No, it does not. The problem is this: To sustain a notion of validation that is distinct from mere coherence, the notion of narrative truth must *not* be formally identical with what Spence (1982) terms "narrative fit." Narrative fit is one important determinant of narrative truth: "Fit lends a compelling kind of truth to the pieces of the pattern" (p. 170). Insofar as a narrative is both persuasive and fit—compelling—it possesses narrative truth (Spence 1983, 465). What separates narrative persuasiveness from narrative fit is not any issue regarding how an interpretation or construction integrates formally or abstractly into an analytically imagined history; the formal criteria are identical (cf. Spence 1982, 144-47; 1983, 461-63).

Narrative persuasiveness demands more than consistency or coherence; it involves as well what Spence (1983) calls "here and now fit." The hallmark of this type of fitness, as distinct from mere narrative fit, is how the suggested addition "meshes with the current experience of the patient in the transference" (p. 462). The test of what "meshes with current experience," in turn, is what occurs in the analytic session: "Basic to any conviction is the match between the productions of the patient and the narrative that is being constructed" (p. 463).

Two problems arise here. Both relate to the general problem of the underdetermination of theories, that is, that logically incompatible theories can account for much or all the same data. Narratives, I maintain, are always underdetermined; more than one, each *prima facie* plausible, will always be available. It is precisely at this juncture that "here and now fit" is to distinguish the path taken from those not taken. But, it turns out, what gives a narrative its persuasiveness is how it coheres with the rest of the previously constructed narrative. Spence's account then, is circular; persuasiveness, which was to be something more than mere fit, is revealed as no more than a consequence of it.

Spence acknowledges that more than one psychoanalytic narrative may be constructed from an analysand's reports:

Many different theories of psychotherapy may each have a claim on the truth and there is no necessary contradiction in the fact that we can find Jungian, Freudian, and Kleinian symbols in the same dream. . .

It suggests that discovery is never conclusive because for any narrative selected, there may be many others which could be found. The one we choose to present to the patient must have more to recommend it than the fact that it was simply "there." (p. 461)

Spence's criteria of "narrative persuasion" are to guide choice of narrative strategy, but the acknowledged underdetermination of choice already sabotages any hope that "continuous validation" discriminates among narrative options. This is because what possibly counts as validating evidence depends on one's prior selection of a strategy, and evidence does not determine that choice. It is one matter to validate an interpretation given a particular strategy; however, there is no way of validating a strategy, apart from any larger context of adjudication.

But the problem is worse than just that of underdetermination of strategy. Even *within* a chosen strategy, Spence (1982) acknowledges, more than one pattern can be constructed: "Instead of finding a true instance of structural correspondence, we are often generating a similarity by a clever application of language to a pair of random events; given the flexibility of language, we can almost always succeed" (p. 157, see also 148-151). So whatever an analyst's productions and an analyst's choice of strategy, a narrative is probably constructible.

Spence (1983) observes that "narratives that are assembled from repeated patterns are apparently more persuasive than narratives assembled from apparently random events" (p. 464); persuasion is enhanced, moreover, by general utility, familiarity, and narrative fit. According to Spence (1982),

we begin to see how an undocumented assertion begins to acquire a life of its own, a life that is significantly unrelated to the status of the evidence. In similar fashion, an entirely imaginary interpretation may achieve a certain truth status in the analytic space. It becomes true because it is plausible, because it fits with other parts of the patient's past; over time, if repeated sufficiently often, it becomes familiar, which adds a further sense of truth; and its very frequency, as noted above, can be reassuring. It becomes true, furthermore, because it becomes useful. (p. 171)

But now the factors determinative of narrative fit are what persuade the patient and so, one would assume, invite additional productions

on the analysand's part. But "meshing with current experience" was to *distinguish* simple fit from persuasion. On Spence's own account of matters, however, there is no clear separation of the two.

Because of underdetermination at every level of narrative strategy, there is no claiming that the evidence vouchsafes just one fit as opposed to some other, possibly incompatible narrative. Spence (1983), in alluding to the "perils of narrative persuasion" (p. 480, see also 474-75), in effect concedes just this point. Fit determines what is persuasive rather than persuasiveness being clearly additional to mere fit.

In sum, Spence has no criteria for narrative truth other than the purely formal ones he offers in discussing narrative fit. His "historical truth," to the extent that one has access to it, exercises at most a negative pull on narratives. Plot lines may possibly be falsified by recalcitrant data but never verified (Mink 1981, 236). "Continuous validation" provides no improvement over a demand for coherence because Spence proves unable, finally, to separate issues of fit, persuasion, and evidence. It offers no check on narrative construction not present in the demand for narrative fit. The coherence of the narrative account is, ultimately, the sole criterion of narrative truth.

An account of narrative truth such as Spence's raises special problems for the notion of narrative explanation I defend. Denying that narratives are veridical helps to handle Grünbaum's original challenge. The new problems reintroduce the question of verisimilitude, for how else can one explain what happens when an interpretation succeeds? How can what is merely a good story engender therapeutic insight? The narrativizing of explanations appears to separate explanation and historical fact. Something, it seems, has gone wrong.

It is tempting, at this point, to suggest that the project goes awry at the outset. The countenancing of narrativization and the concomitant contextualization of truth may be identified as the source of the unwanted separation of history and fact. Morris Eagle (1980, 1984) rehearses a variant of this complaint. Eagle notes that narrativists such as Spence contextualize truth and so deny that a history has any necessary connection to the analysand's life *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. Spence's account of what makes interpretations valid then engenders the complaint noted earlier, namely, there is then no saying why any plausible—thematically consistent—interpretation fails. Eagle (1980) argues that

there are no doubt real analogies among all interpretive activities, including between physics and literary criticism. However, I believe that Cheshire (and others who argue similarly) overlooks important differences. On the simplest level, an experiencing person with a life history is not a musical composition to be relatively freely interpreted one way or another. (p. 421)

If narrative fit is all that counts, then Spence cannot appeal to any notion of truth to separate the merely apparently good interpretation from those that are, in fact, good. Stress on narrative fit, that is, is insufficient to account for the validity accorded an interpretation.

Spence (1983) denies Eagle's allegation that perspectival approaches are effectively unconstrained by facts: "to argue for narrative truth is not to claim that analyzing is mere storytelling, or that the analyst is somehow dishonestly claiming for the patient something that he knows in fact is false" (p. 469). Spence, instead, insists that "to argue for a creative interpretation which maximizes narrative truth is not to argue that just any interpretation will do; and to admit that historical truth is sometimes out of reach is not to argue that hard facts should be disregarded" (p. 470). But, as a close analysis of Spence's position reveals, the problem is not that Spence disregards data. The problem is that his account leaves no space in which to distinguish between explanation and persuasion.

Spence (1983) ultimately propounds an "aesthetic criterion of truth": "It may be useful to think of an interpretation as being a certain kind of aesthetic experience as opposed to being an utterance that is either (historically) true or false" (p. 268). Contrary to what the name connotes, the aesthetic theory of truth is fundamentally pragmatic; that is, it looks to the efficacy of interventions. "Whether we think of an interpretation as a special kind of speech act which belongs to the category of pragmatic statements or as an artistic product, to be evaluated according to aesthetic criteria, we are primarily interested in the effect it produces rather than its past credentials" (p. 276). Spence's narrative strategy, then, gives historical truth no special role to play.

Indeed, Spence's appeal to an "aesthetic theory of psychoanalytic truth" aggravates the difficulty Eagle attributes to his position. Spence here concedes that "the analyst, like it or not, is engaged in an artistic struggle with the patient" (p. 294). Concomitantly, he denies that any general rules are applicable to arbitrating this struggle (p. 292). The pragmatic element Spence initially emphasizes transmutes into a

political issue of whose will prevails regarding the rightness of an interpretation.

This suffices to convict Spence of the charge that Eagle brings against him. Spence unwittingly reduces the correctness of interpretations to matters of power and taste and ultimately portrays the struggle between analyst and analysand as a battle of wills over whose taste shall prevail. For Spence, *nothing* else could decide the matter.

Narrative explanations may also be faulted as inadequate for the task of explaining psychoanalytic practice. Janet Malcolm (1987) argues that conceiving of psychoanalytic explanations as a type of narrative simply misses what is, in fact, important about psychoanalysis. Freud's papers on analytic technique constitute, in Malcolm's felicitous phrase, "the poetics of psychoanalysis." What is the purpose of this poetic? Spence's reply is: to help construct a case history based on the utterances of an analysand. But, Malcolm complains, this mistakes a by-product of the analysis with its essence. She strongly denies that "psychoanalysis is a sort of cure by narrative" (p. 101), a cure effected by reflecting on some *story* or other. Rather, "it is in the particular, idiosyncratic, ineffable encounter between patient and analyst that the 'story' of an analysis is lodged" (p. 100). Her account locates the importance of psychoanalysis in the special type of *process* that analysis is. Narrativization excludes, because of its emphasis on finished products, any explanation of ongoing therapeutic interaction. But such an exclusion, she insists, means that it is no explanation at all.

Behind the complaints of both Eagle and Malcolm, I suggest, is the intuition that narratives omit the viscera; narrativization drains the blood from the body of psychoanalytic knowledge. Narrativization does this by slighting a concern for truth or by falsely elevating a product (the case history) over the process. It provides, in either case, no explanation of why the process succeeds when it does.

II.

Two problems, then, emerge from a close examination of Spence's account of narrative. First, given his emphasis on narratives as constructions, what matters is how a construction or interpretation promotes assured conviction. This, we say, reduces to a matter of narra-

tive fit. Yet this criterion proves too weak a condition to explain why what works works. Hence narrative fit cannot be a sufficient condition of explanation. Second, any defense of narrative explanation needs to indicate why "assured conviction" may substitute for historical truth in interpretations.

Suppose Spence were to maintain that fit is only a necessary condition of explanation? This proves of no avail in rescuing Spence's notion of narrative truth. His skepticism requires that he maintain that only the psychoanalytic narrative counts; yet he acknowledges that some interpretations—some narrative interpolations and extrapolations—work better than others. But the latter fact is inconsistent with the former claim: If "working better" means something other than the general consistency of the analytic narrative, then it is not only the analytic narrative that counts. So if Spence claims that narrative fit is only a necessary condition for interpretative efficacy, then it seems that narrative truth implicitly appeals to conditions independent of the analytically constructed narrative. If so, then Spence builds into his explanation an appeal to the sort of extrinsic factors which his account was designed to exclude.

Spence's need to affirm and deny the importance of extrinsic factors arises because he insists on a contrast between narratives and some independently subsisting Past—the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. Yet Spence never questions the legitimacy of the contrast with which he starts. It is this distinction, in fact, that is inconsistent with Spence's relativist proclivities and creates problems for a narrative model of explanation. Ironically, and contrary to what Eagle maintains, Spence's problem is that he is still too closely wedded to a notion of historical truth. A more critical look at the key contrast between narrative and historical truth, I argue, resolves the apparent problems with a narrativist strategy.

Historical truth, if such there were, could be used to adjudicate issues of veridicality because it represents the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. But this image is not ultimately an intelligible one.⁶ Briefly, the problem is that past events exist, qua events, only in terms of some historically situated conception of them. The notion of a historical truth for events, that is, a perspective on happenings untainted by human perception and categorization, proves to be incoherent. There exists a world not of our making, but any subdivision of it into specific events is our doing, not nature's.

Spence himself marshals any number of arguments against the view of a pristine present, one untainted by the ills to which human memory and perception are prey.⁷ His mistake is thinking of these factors as obstacles to objectivity rather than as problems which throw into question the whole notion of historical truth. Spence remains wedded to a conception of a person's past as fixed, static, a *ding-an-sich* at temporal remove. This creates a contrast between historical truth and a supposedly inferior surrogate notion—narrative truth. The contrast fails because the relevant notion of historical truth cannot be made cogent. There is no historical truth to contrast with narrative truth; there is only our ongoing attempt to make the best sense we can of the present in light of what experience reveals.

My rejection of Spence's "historical truth" is no *denial* of reality; what it does rule out is invidious distinctions between our view of events and some God's-eye perception of states of affairs. In denying historical truth, I assert that there only are events "under a description" (to borrow Anscombe's phrase).

All narratives, in this regard, are constructions; no narrative could be a reconstruction. Historical narratives might be likened to constellations. No one, I presume, denies that there are constellations. Yet there are no constellations without the presence and cognizing activity of human perceivers. Constellations are not created *ex nihilo*, but neither does it make sense to claim that they exist apart from an order imposed on certain objects. The fictitious nature of constellations is no bar to their playing pragmatically important roles in human affairs; for example, they may aid in navigation. Likewise, in claiming that narratives are, one and all, constructions, I am claiming that there is no *natural* order, no single story line, known or unknown, to a life history. Historical narratives, like constellations, are our products. To say that narratives are neither true nor false is to assert that there is no "natural plot" for narrativization to follow.

The reality of historical objects is just that of any posit useful in organizing experience. I agree, in this respect, with Murray Murphey's (1973) suggestion that "George Washington enjoys at present the epistemological status of an electron: each is an entity postulated for the purpose of giving coherence to our present experience, and each is unobservable by us" (p. 16). He concludes, more generally, that "the whole of our historical knowledge is a theoretical construction for the purpose of explaining observational evidence" (p. 16). There is no

warrant for maintaining that there is some static past world which diligent research in the archives or on the couch uncovers.

As a first pass at answering Eagle, then, the distinction between narrative truth and historical truth must be rejected as a type of conceptual mistake.⁸ Given a notion of historical truth, Spence put himself in the ultimately untenable position of denying that what happens matters. His contrast between an analytically constructed past and the Past causes him to worry, despite what he says about narrative truth, narrative fit, and narrative persuasion, that a past narratively imagined importantly falsifies the Past. This leads Spence to suspect that there are other conditions to which narratives must answer—as if he must find a psychoanalyst's stone for transmuting good narratives into good interpretations. And it is precisely on this worry regarding "the perils of narrative persuasion" that Eagle seizes.

While my analysis frees Spence of an inconsistency, it is not yet a full answer to the problem with which I began. Ridding oneself of a notion of historical truth does not thereby dispel the sense that psychoanalytic explanations call for something more than a good narrative. Eagle (1989) himself states that "it is easy to accept calmly, even blithely, the denigration of historical truth" (p. 639). Yet, he goes on to observe, the fact that a "narrative is persuasive, effective, coherent, or elegant does not guarantee that it answers adequately to the reality of who the person is, however complex that reality may be" (p. 638). And it is reality so conceived, what Eagle terms the "contemporary truth of the person" (p. 638), which must serve as the foil for any candidate interpretation.

The problem around which we are circling concerns what the "something more" is that explains why some constructions and interpretations work. My efforts so far have aimed at denying the basic cogency of there being something like "one true history" of the sort Freud imagined. Likewise, Eagle's suggestion that we attend to "the reality of who the person is" does not impress me as a promising formulation primarily because I can attach no sense to what would constitute such a reality.

My response to the question about what the "something more" is that separates the good narrative explanations from the bad is that the entire question is misconceived. The *prima facie* plausibility of the question simply rests on a mistake. Spence, having foisted on himself a distinction between narrative truth and historical truth, was then

obligated by the logic of his position to explain every relevant clinical fact by appealing to some fact about narrative construction. He leaves himself with no other resources for explanation. But no formal characteristic of narrative construction can bear the burden which he places on it. How could it, since narrativization does not, by form alone, mark off history from fiction? In addition, narrative fit will not do to explain goodness of interpretation, for by Spence's account, indefinitely many fits are always possible.

Of course, there is something more that makes a certain narrative account evoke the desired response, but this something more is also a product of the explanations we provide of the world around us. How the notion of narrative explanation that I advocate resolves this problem for the case of psychoanalysis is nicely developed in an article by Serge Viderman (1979).⁹

Viderman describes how the linguistic/ conceptual resources available for articulating experiences also gives them form. While giving voice to experiences is necessarily a creative act, it is not creation ex nihilo.¹⁰ Nor does it make sense, Viderman (1979) argues, to speak of the language conforming to or fitting aboriginal experiences. Prior to articulation, experience has no "shape" for conceptualization to conform to or fit:

The archaic experiences have no structure, no figurable shape. Only interpretive speech can shape them and endow them with a new representation of what no longer exists except in a splintered, fragmented, unrecognizable form. Speech provides a denomination that unifies and concretizes them in a totally original way and in a form that exists nowhere in the unconscious of the patient, or anywhere else but in the analytic space through the language that provides it with form. (p. 262)

Viderman's claim is that the "analytic space"—the physical and intellectual framework provided by analysis—gives shape and structure to "archaic experiences." The experiences here are no more figments of anyone's imagination than are quarks, for example; but just as the reality of quarks cannot be attested to without invoking a great deal of esoteric theory, so too with archaic experiences in the analytic space.

Viderman defines the notion of "analytic space" narrowly: It consists of the physical space containing analyst and analysand, and it is defined as well by the "poetics of analysis." Within this space the drama consisting of the transference and countertransference occurs (pp. 277-82, esp. 282). The analytic space so conceived corresponds, I

suggest, to where the psychoanalytic counterpart of Kuhnian "normal science," the activity of puzzle solving within an accepted paradigm, takes place. The therapeutic process generates the puzzles which constructions and interpretations aim to solve.

Thought of as a puzzle-solving activity whose problems are set in the analytic sessions, the question of narrative construction in analysis becomes a question of how the psychoanalytic account of the analysand's life will be continued, what the lines of development will be. Do these lines of development exist independently of the analytic space? Are quarks invented or discovered? This is no denial of the importance or reality of what occurs to people in the course of their life. The claim is that it is within the analytic space that events obtain a shape, are given a description, which establishes which events are important and why. Most significant, this explanation of what is important and why provides a problem-solving model; it permits a new integration and understanding of previously anomalous and troubling experiences. As in a paradigm shift, the world is seen anew; new options appear and new lines of action become possible. The self-understanding configured within the analytic space thus becomes a basis for action in other contexts as well.

What is important is to have theory that works, a space to work within. For Videman, "the effort of scientific activity is not aimed at *describing* the inexhaustible complexity of visible facts but at turning the complicated and visible into something simple and invisible" (p. 269). The analytic space creates a dynamic which is real, and that is reality enough. In his recent book on Freud, Michael Roth (1987) puts this view of the matter nicely:

Thus, the transference is not a technique to achieve on a personal level the goal of a Rankean history as it really happened. It is instead the enactment of the past in the present in the service of discovering historical meaning and direction; of making meaning out of the directionality one discovers in constructing and reconstructing one's life. In other words, the transference brings together what Donald Spence has called "narrative truth" and "historical truth." The transference is the vehicle for creating meaning and direction out of a life that has lost significant connections between past, present, and future. Constructing with and through analysis the narrative that will make these connections . . . is the actualization of psycho-analysis as a theory of history. (p. 124)

Collapsing historical truth and narrative truth is *not* to declare that one may be indifferent to or pretend there is no distinction between fiction and fact. The general philosophical lesson, rather, is that any

distinction drawn between which facts matter and which do not is always done *intratheoretically*. There is no other way for such discriminations to be made. Discriminations *between* theories, this view implies, are inevitably pragmatic ones made relative to particular needs and concerns.

Viderman (1979), in this regard, is prone to speak of, for example, interpretations "becoming true" within the analytic space: "The interpretation . . . *became true* through a dynamic process which created it; it is not true per se, that is, outside the situation in which it was uttered" (p. 265). I suspect that Viderman's unfortunate juxtaposition of the remark that a statement "became true" with the idea of statements that are "true per se" may evoke unease, but this is only the bad old idea of historical truth popping up again. There are not two kinds of truths—those which our best theories affirm and some other kind. Statements about oxygen, for example, became true with Lavoisier; no measure of insight or assurance is added by insisting that such statements are, in addition, "true per se." There are only the truths of theory; any other characterization is vacuous.

There is no need to posit a "something more" for psychoanalytic narratives to be about—no need, in other words, to populate the universe with Eagle's "reality of who the person is." Narrative explanations are accepted for fundamentally the same sorts of reasons as any explanations are—because they achieve our purposes, because they fit the accepted evidence, because they provide fruitful new lines of inquiry.

As I noted at the outset of this article, the narrativist model seeks to accomplish two purposes. First, the model seeks to do justice to the sort of explanations, such as case histories, found in psychoanalytic literature; second, likening these explanatory narratives to Kuhnian normal science provides a unified model of explanation, one which captures features common to explanations in all areas of empirical inquiry. My account, if viable, offers reasons for accepting narrative explanations in psychoanalysis as scientific. More generally, my analysis requires no invidious distinctions between types of explanations across disciplines; there is no need to insist that narrative explanations are *sui generis*.

The view of explanation urged here escapes, at long last, the shadow of the unity of method thesis, that last lingering vestige of positivism which has continued to obscure debate on this topic. Unlike that view, this model does not insist that some one science be

paradigmatic of explanation. In addition, my proposal to take a Kuhnian normal science account as a model of what an explanation is identifies key characteristics common to all explanations. My purpose is to forestall debates over the scientific status of psychoanalysis which are motivated by the discipline's alleged inability to work within a format subject to the constraints of experience. Problems remain, but they are not ones which arise because psychoanalysts possess some quirky conception of truth.¹¹

What, finally, is to be said of Malcolm's complaint? Is the narrativist strategy too impoverished? Does it exclude by its nature the heart of the psychoanalytic process? If, as I claimed earlier, the analytic space is just the laboratory within which the psychoanalytic version of normal science is pursued, then Malcolm's fascination with the poetics of analysis finds its analog in what Hans Reichenbach terms the "logic of discovery." That is, narrative explanations cannot tell why an insight occurred when it did, why a certain moment was right for intervention. Explanations belong to the logic of justification, to the finished form in which a scientist presents his or her results for peer evaluation. This is to say that crucial matters of technique (e.g., the timing of an intervention) are more a matter of art than of science.

There is no *formal* characteristic which necessarily separates a scientific hypothesis that succeeds from one that does not. The question of which hypothesis to accept is not generally settled by careful scrutiny of the manner in which they are stated. Analogously, my claim is that it is futile to seek some general formal characteristic of narratives which settles the issue of which are the good explanations. There are, I believe, general formal constraints which any candidate narrative explanation incorporates. A narrativist strategy cannot reasonably be held liable for failing to specify, in advance of research, which narratives are efficacious. It would be a strange theory of explanation that did that.

There is no magic formula for how to unravel the tangled and forgotten skeins of memory that enmesh a person. Malcolm (1987), certainly, appreciates that the process she so admires is one of individuals learning to disengage themselves from forgotten beliefs which yet live on and hold them in thrall:

For what Freud wrote in the Wolf Man case was not that a person but that a *child* catches hold of this phylogenetic experience. . . . These powerful, magical stories that we as infants tell ourselves are never outlived or forgotten. They remain in unconscious life, and they cause us poi-

gnant suffering throughout our conscious lives. Psychoanalysis seeks to mitigate our sufferings by loosening the hold of these stories on us—by convincing us, through the transference, that they are stories, and not the way things “are.” (p. 101)

Malcolm speaks movingly of breaking the hold that certain stories have on us, of ending, at least, the neurotic misery. Yet the narrativist point urged by Spence, Viderman, and M. Roth, I take it, is just that the hold of old stories is broken by using the transference to find what those stories are and how they might be re-emplotted. The process of the analysis is the uncovering of those views that trouble us and learning what to put in their place. In this respect, there is no separating an explanation of the process from that of the narrative construction.

Einstein is said to have remarked that the purpose of science is not to give us the taste of the soup. Malcolm finds that the narrativist account leaves no taste, and that troubles her. But psychoanalytic explanations cannot be expected to recapitulate in their statements the real and undeniable struggles which made them possible. In Rorty's (1986) words,

the point of psychoanalysis is the same as that of reflection on the sort of character one would like to have, once one ceases to take a single vocabulary for granted and begins the attempt to revise and enlarge the very vocabulary in which one is at present reflecting. The point . . . is to find new self-descriptions whose adoption will enable one to alter one's behavior. Finding out the views of one's unconscious about one's past is a way of getting some additional suggestions about how to describe (and change) oneself in the future. As a way of getting such suggestions, psychoanalysis differs from reading history, novels, or treatises on moral philosophy only in being more painful, in being more likely to produce radical change, and in requiring a partner. (p. 10)

NOTES

1. A good example of this trend is found in the writings of Roy Schafer (see, e.g., 1980, 1981). Interested readers might also consult Sarbin 1986, especially Frederick Wyatt's article, "The Narrative in Psychoanalysis."

2. I offer a more detailed analysis of a form of narrative explanation in Roth 1989.

3. As I argue in detail elsewhere, the question is one of best fit, fruitfulness, and related criteria of theory evaluation. Once positivism goes, straightforward accounts of falsification go as well. If, as I believe, the historical model is a better way to conceive of the psychoanalytic endeavor, then the issues of what constitutes a good psychoanalytic account become a problem of the historiography employed. I discuss issues of verisimilitude and falsification in narratives in Roth 1988.

4. For a positive evaluation of Spence's work, see M. Roth (1987, 118 n. 42). Opposition to Spence's approach from someone who favors a more traditional conception of psychoanalytic explanation as scientific explanation is found in Edelson 1984. Indeed, Edelson hints that to go Spence's way signals a true loss of faith in the psychoanalytic project.

5. Citations for Freud's position are given in Grünbaum 1980 (esp. pp. 319-22), where he describes what he terms Freud's "Tally Argument." Related citations from Freud are given in M. Roth (1987, 75). There is at least some evidence, or so it strikes me, that Freud harbors ambivalence about the role of truth in his account. He will, for example, speak of the analytic relationship being based on a mutual "love of truth" while openly equating his metapsychological speculations with fantasizing (see Freud 1964a, 225, 248). Michael Roth (1987) marks Freud's move away from the seduction theory as the crucial first step in throwing off a Rankean view of history and moving to a "mature" theory of psychoanalysis (p. 75).

6. This is argued more fully in Roth 1988.

7. Some compelling doubts regarding the nature of memory and whether it even makes sense to speak of certain memories as veridical are aired by Freud (1963) in a long footnote in the course of his discussion of the Rat Man (pp. 63-64 n. 38).

8. A similar conclusion is maintained by Freeman (1985, 158-59). However, Freeman's line of approach is significantly different from that urged here.

9. Related points are noted by Freeman (1985, 153-59). There are a number of important points of agreement between Freeman's views and my own, although he approaches issues through a hermeneutic concern with conditions of dialogue and communication. I am also less confident than is Freeman that Freud would endorse collapsing historical truth and narrative truth as both he and I advocate. Spence (1982) also appeals to Viderman's work but does so for purposes of arguing for interpretation as a creative act. Spence claims that Viderman conceives of the analyst's function more on analogy with a poet than with a historian. While Spence clearly approves of viewing interpretations as historically unconstrained and especially creative acts, this deflects emphasis from Viderman's extremely sophisticated understanding of analysis (see pp. 138, 164-66, 177-79).

10. While Kuhn 1962 is the book in philosophy of science with which most non-philosophers seem to be familiar, his work has been used to argue for extraordinarily relativist conclusions. For work which nicely develops the antirealist line without suggesting that somehow we make everything up, see especially Hanson 1965. More recently, this line is argued by Putnam (1981).

11. Eagle (1989), after providing a comprehensive, trenchant, and grim assessment of the evidence favoring core psychoanalytic hypotheses, nonetheless continues to adhere to a standard conception of the form of psychoanalytic theory, that is, that of a theory in natural science. While one may readily agree with Eagle in insisting that psychoanalytic theory and therapeutic practice are distinct, he is intent on denying that any notion of narrative illuminates this relation (see, e.g., p. 417 n. 56). But if one considers, for example, Marxist theory and a Marxist analysis of a particular historical episode, the sort of relation that Eagle has in mind might very well be that of historiography and a particular history. That is, a theory of personality development just might turn out to be more like a theory of history than, say, like theory in physics. As much has been suggested regarding evolutionary theory in biology, it may well be that psychoanalytic theory is more like that.

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