

tion to some explicit rule, and “acts are liable to normative assessments insofar as they are governed by propositionally explicit prescriptions, prohibition and permission” (p. 19). Habermas succumbs to this Kantian temptation in discussing the usefulness of formal pragmatics and in this way sees them as modeled on explicit principles. I have shown here how implicit norms can be used critically, albeit indirectly. Explicit norms developed from formal pragmatics could become the basis for a normative moral or political theory in wide reflective equilibrium; the analysis of implicit norms could form the basis for critical social inquiry into normative practices.

26. On this view of the critical theory of distorted communication as based on an account of communication as a practical ability with implicit norms, see Bohman, “Formal Pragmatics as a Critical Theory,” in *Perspectives on Habermas*, ed. L. Hahn (Indianapolis: Open Court, forthcoming).

27. On the role of perspectives in critical, public communication, see Bohman 1996, chaps. 3–4.

28. Brandom 1994, p. 600.

29. I leave for another occasion the discussion of whether this normativity is deontic or prudential. It would be deontic if it were based in particular interpretive obligations; it would be prudential if the norms were based on the desire to achieve the goal of communication. I hold that such norms are deontic and not merely prudential, but the difference is not relevant for my epistemological purpose here.

30. Geertz 1986, pp. 122–123. For a further discussion of the inadequacy of ethnocentrism as an unavoidably first-person plural perspective in interpretation and the source of postmodern skepticism about interpretation, see Bohman 1991, pp. 142–145. Here I still thought of the answer to such “us versus them” skepticism only in terms of the problem of evidence for judging better or worse interpretations rather than in terms of practical verification found in establishing and maintaining social relationships.

31. I would like to thank Paul Roth, Karsten Stueber, Bert Kögler, and Jason Murphy for their helpful comments.

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Chapter Ten

The Object of Understanding

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Silence, the absence of signals, is itself a signal. . . . To say that it is impossible to communicate is false; one always can. To refuse to communicate is a failing; we are biologically and socially predisposed to communication, and in particular to its highly evolved and noble form, which is language.

—Primo Levi

It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind—all speakers of a language, at least—share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.

—Donald Davidson

What is the object of understanding? Answers to this question can be (philosophically) simple or complex, depending on the meaning given the term “object.” Construing “object” as “goal” or “purpose” permits a philosophically simple answer. For that reading carries no presumption that there is some discrete thing or process to theorize about. Thus “to satisfy one’s curiosity” suffices to answer the initial question.

But the simple answer might seem far too simple. Real understanding, the thought may be, is not a question of what satisfies an individual’s curiosity but rather an issue of whether one correctly grasps *the* meaning. From this perspective arises a second, quite complex reading of the opening question. The object of understanding (purposively construed) becomes a true or correct description of the associated object. This reading posits a fact of the matter to understanding and makes it something to theorize about.¹

Disputes regarding the objectivity of historical explanation involve in fact arguments over the plausibility of each of these different readings—the simple and the complex.² In particular, the simple reading is held too simple to underwrite claims to truth or objectivity for historical explanations. Efforts to vouchsafe the scientific status of historical explanation traditionally urge either the complex reading just noted or a formalist account of explanation. But efforts to tie the scientific status of history (or any other discipline) to some model or other of explanation have proven futile and do not concern me here.

Ironically, as challenges to the scientific status of narrative historical explanation have receded from the philosophical scene, disputes regarding the objectivity of such explanations have come more to the fore among those countenancing them. The focus of the debate is whether the past is an object that (true) narratives represent or whether narratives create (as in explicitly fictional works) coherent views but do not represent some independent object—The Past. The former view I dub “narrative realism,” the latter “narrative antirealism.” On the narrative realist view, narrative explanations correctly explain when representing the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. In this respect, claims to objectivity by narrative realists assume the complex reading.

Two sorts of defense of narrative realism predicated on the determinacy of “the object of understanding” can be found in the literature. These theories couch their metaphysics of understanding either in terms of the constraints the world imposes on our efforts at systematic understanding or with regard to claims about the structural interrelation of intention, action, and narrative.

Regarding the former, Michael Levine and Jeff Malpas take it that events are like natural kinds, and true histories are true because they depict these and how they are connected.³ The latter view, found in the work of David Carr, takes a more explicitly idealist position with regard to the object of understanding.⁴ For Carr, the object of understanding is constituted by the intentional structure of action. Moreover, the intentionality of actions entails that they possess a narrative structure.

Both types of theories presume that our understanding of historical actions is right or wrong (true or false). Levine, Malpas, and Carr defend the assumptions basic to a traditional “scientific” conception of history: “(1) They accepted a correspondence theory of truth holding that history portrays people who really existed and actions that really took place. (2) They presupposed that human actions mirror the intentions of the actors and that it is the task of the historian to comprehend these intentions in order to construct a coherent historical story.”⁵ I examine their views in turn, detailing the way in which each relies on a complex reading of “object of understanding” to underwrite narrative realism.⁶ As I hope to show, their ac-

counts of understanding are not made plausible either through appeal to historical practice or a priori argument.

1. Historical Realism: A View from Nowhere

What could it mean to say that historians can, as Levine and Malpas urge, “tell it like it was”? According to these authors, “realism with respect to the past means not only that the past existed but that past actuality is an objective reality discoverable in principle as it was. It is the metaphysical assumption needed to suppose that one can ‘tell it like it was.’”⁷ Their argument has two steps. The first seeks to establish the metaphysical assumption that “reality” has an inherent narrative structure. By this they mean that there is a determinate historical past consisting of distinct types of events interrelated in a specific way. The second step maintains that proper methods of historical inquiry so constrain narrative representations of this historical reality that proper narratives conform to this object of understanding, that is, correctly represent The Past.

What underwrites the metaphysical assumption? Central to their discussion here is Arthur Danto’s well-known “thought experiment” of an Ideal Chronicler (IC) and the corresponding Ideal Chronicle. The IC, Danto imagines, writes down everything that happens as it happens. Would the corresponding chronicle, Danto asks, constitute a type of observational database on which to predicate claims to historical knowledge?

Danto posits the experiment to test the hypothesis of the possibility of a *complete* and definitive factual record of the past.⁸ Danto argues that any effort at an Ideal Chronicle fails because there will be true descriptions of a particular moment or event that cannot be known true at that time. One example is: “The Thirty Years War began in 1618.” Even an IC cannot record every description true of what happens when it happens.

Levine and Malpas believe that such incompleteness does not tell against the metaphysical assumption of an independent record of the past. Their goal is to chart a *via media* for realism, which, on the one hand, avoids the demand for completeness that Danto imputes to such idealizations and, on the other hand, repudiates narrative antirealist positions (such as my own) in which the event structure that we find is only the one we put there.⁹ Their arguments for this realism consist of efforts to show the incoherence or implausibility of Danto’s position and my own. I examine these arguments in turn.¹⁰

Regarding Danto, they believe that he sins against historical realism by making the structure of the IC too conceptually austere. Danto’s Ideal Chronicler does not observe, as Levine and Malpas think, a genuine realist must. They complain that Danto misjudges the character of what a chronicler chronicles because he ignores the fact that events are temporally ex-

tended. For an Ideal Chronicle to constitute an observational analog for historical theorizing, it must, Levine and Malpas insist, incorporate descriptions of observed acts that extend beyond what is available to observation at any given moment. For, they charge, by supposing the IC chronicling only moment to moment, Danto's way of posing the hypothesis denies any possibility of coherence to the imagined chronicle. The metaphysical picture Levine and Malpas propose provides a basis for historical truth not by having the chronicle depict a complete record but by having it account for how happenings actually interconnect.

[Danto] conceives of the Ideal Chronicle as a purely observational account of the past, which stands to historical narrative much as observational evidence stands to theory. Yet . . . the organisational structure embodied in narrative is to be found not only in history, but in even the most basic descriptions of events as well. Danto's account is thus mistaken in its insistence on excluding all temporal or narrative descriptions from the chronicle, for if one removes the narrative structure from the events, then one also removes their temporal structure and, perhaps, even their character as events.¹¹

Theirs could be called a "causal realism" about The Past. Events have a brute temporal and causal structure, one that is also an incipient narrative structure.

It is this allegedly base level and ineliminable narrative structure of events that provides the independent factual basis for establishing the objectivity of historical explanations. For if the notion of an Ideal Chronicle is coherent, they claim, then it entails incorporation of an Ideal Narrative—a particular way of interrelating events. And the notion of an Ideal Chronicle, they maintain, is coherent.

For example, suppose a pitcher in a baseball game throws a curve ball. Noting the pitcher's movements at each instant would not, I take Levine and Malpas to be contending, necessarily be to record the event "the throwing of the curve ball." On the Levine-Malpas view, that event was "present" in the structure of the act from the outset. There is one event—a pitch—that is temporally and causally extended. Correct descriptions at a moment transcend the moment, that is, incorporate or anticipate an indefinite number of earlier and later events in being properly described at a time T.

But matters are even more complex on the Levine-Malpas view than this. In an earlier essay (Roth 1988), I used a fictional example drawn from the film *Rashomon* to raise doubts about the notion of the "same" event, and so of a single causal order for historical explanation. The varying narratives offered by characters in that film could not be summed because inconsistent; they could not be chosen between because empirically equivalent. Levine and Malpas flatly deny that there are such situations: "Not all

descriptions will be allowed because not all can be true. Either the wife was raped or she was not raped. Perhaps something other than rape occurred."¹² We are not told whose criteria are determinative of what type of event each event is, but clearly some criteria are. The Ideal Chronicler is also to be an Absolute Judge.

Cases such as these are taken to establish that in order to chronicle correctly, the Ideal Chronicle must look beyond the horizon of the present. If the IC is held unable to look beyond the present, then Danto's thought experiment leads only to a paradox. For, to the extent that the horizon of observation is restricted to the moment, events remain unperceived. Yet expanding the horizon embeds a narrative/temporal element within the chronicle. So the chronicle must anticipate the future or it cannot chronicle the present.¹³

One might well wonder about their easy linking of "narrative structure," "temporal structure," and "event structure." For not all (or, one suspects, even most) events are ipso facto narratives, especially in the sense relevant to historical explanation—the presenting of a causal explanation. Consider again the pitcher's pitch. This surely is an event, but it is just as surely not a narrative. The statement "the pitcher threw a curve" is not a story, much less an explanation. Actions may have a beginning-middle-end structure, but this is not sufficient to give acts a narrative (or explanatory) structure.¹⁴

Now a way to try to save the point that Levine and Malpas appear to want to make would be to argue that, at the observational level, what one sees is the action—the throwing of the curve ball. Thus, for an Ideal Chronicle to be an observational analog to perceptual data in epistemology, it must record the facts one observes just as, for example, one observes whole objects—apples—and not red patches of such and such a shape from which one infers the existence of an apple. But this argument does not prove enough in the sense that there is still no narrative structure to be found in the perceived action. It proves too much insofar as it would license multiple descriptions of how the sequences of behavior are perceived, some of which deny the temporal structure Levine and Malpas seem to believe is necessary. For unlike apples and red patches, there are individuals—for example, baseball naïfs—who will just perceive the discrete behaviors and be "blind" to the action. So where the enthusiast sees a particular act—the pitch of the curve ball—the untutored sees unconnected sequences.

The above considerations suffice to show why it is simply false to declare, as Levine and Malpas do, that Danto's way of posing the task of the IC is incoherent. For that argument depends on the assertion that the IC cannot record without including a specific temporal or narrative structure. But nothing said as yet shows that observational reports must honor some

one particular description over another. Yet a necessary temporal structure, in their sense, is there only under a particular description of the act.

The fact that some descriptions require temporal structures but others do not raises questions, in addition, about what would make the IC *ideal*. Imagine an IC taking a steadfastly third-person view of the behaviors and goings-on, for example, of an alien ethnographer with no prior knowledge of any characteristic human action. Perhaps there is a methodological mandate *not* to assume the native's way of describing matters.¹⁵ All Levine and Malpas do is beg the question against Danto's IC by insisting upon a descriptive stance favorable to their conclusion. In short, they establish no necessary entailment from an Ideal Chronicle to an Ideal Narrative (or any narrative) structure. Nothing they adduce by way of argument or example establishes that incorporating anticipatory temporal or narrative structure is a necessary condition to the very idea of an Ideal Chronicle. In consequence, even if their notion of an Ideal Chronicle is coherent, it does not entail a narrative form. Hence, their metaphysical claim remains unfounded.

Turning from their arguments against Danto to those addressed to me, my worry regarding the notion of an IC was not the incompleteness of descriptions but their "theory-ladenness." My challenge, in other words, was not to the capacity to chronicle, but the possible meaning of "ideal." If the term was meant to connote an analog to "the given" for perceptual knowledge, then, I claimed, no such ideal is possible. In this regard, my position challenges Levine and Malpas's second premise, namely, that the methods of inquiry suffice to constrain narrative representations to conform to the object of understanding.

Levine and Malpas begin by conceding that my arguments provide grounds "for the claim that *event descriptions* are not 'natural' entities." But, they wonder, "what justifies the apparent slide from talk of event-descriptions to talk of plain events?" As they note, my position "is justified only on the assumption that there are no events apart from their description, but this is exactly the point at issue."¹⁶ To illustrate the weakness of what they take to be my position, Levine and Malpas offer the following example of the distinction between events and event-descriptions.

For, of course, no chronicle, ideal or not, contains events in other than a very loose sense—chronicles, stories, histories, and narratives contain, not events, but event-descriptions. In the same way a list of objects in Smith's briefcase . . . does not contain the objects it lists . . . but only descriptions of those objects or terms referring to this. This simple distinction (for the abandonment of which Roth provides no argument) is what makes possible our claim that different event-descriptions may nevertheless describe the same event. It is also what makes possible the further claim that while there are many ways in which events can be truly described, and so many true narratives, they are all constrained and contained by the same historical past.¹⁷

Levine and Malpas are surely correct to note that the distinction between "events" and "event-descriptions" is one that is crucial to their argument.¹⁸ But I would have thought it obvious that my case turns on no such simple-minded confusion between words and objects. At issue, rather, is how object positing schemes connect to the world.

My worry in the article they cite concerns how one infers from a theory of how the world is divided (into events or whatever) to conclusions about what the structure of the world is *an sich*. I complain that there is no warrant licensing an entailment from one—the descriptions given by historians, for example—to the other—conclusions regarding what there must be. What I say of events (in another passage they quote) is that "they are not known to be of nature's making rather than of ours."

My twist on Danto's ingenious idea is to argue that if an IC is to supply *Protokollsätze* for historians, what the thought experiment actually reveals is the "theory-ladenness" of such erstwhile observations. Even an Ideal Chronicler cannot record in History's Own Vocabulary. There is no isolating what one takes to be true statements about events from other beliefs because to designate an experience as an event is just to have organized it in a certain way. *There is no "ideal" with regard to describing how the pitcher pitches; there are just different levels at which observing such a person will be influenced by other information one possesses or lacks.* My argument warns against the "myth of the given" with regard to historical knowledge.

Ironically and surprisingly, Levine and Malpas appear to endorse the view sketched above, that is, that even an IC could not record in History's Own Vocabulary. "The sense in which our stories correspond, or fail to correspond, to the world—the sense in which they do or do not 'tell it like it was' or 'like it is'—is not a sense which warrants the idea of the past as some untheorised given."¹⁹ But what then licenses the view that some historian's account or other connects in some special "objective" way to events?

They maintain that three types of constraints—evidential, experiential, theoretical (formal)—keep potential disagreements about matters historical within "manageable limits."

But while there is no absolute standard that would have us prefer one set of identity conditions for events or one mode of event description, such conditions and modes of description are nevertheless not just up for grabs. They are embedded in and dictated by our location in the encompassing causal-historical nexus of persons and other things. . . . Indeterminacy is always kept within manageable limits by the constraints imposed by principles of theory construction, existing bodies of knowledge, and so forth.²⁰

What results, they claim, is "an objective unity of historical practice." In consequence, there is "the idea of the single Chronicle to which all histori-

cal research can be seen as contributing. They [historians] should approach it (ideally) asymptotically." The Ideal Chronicle represents a "regulative ideal" by which "to tell a story which connects the facts in the right way."²¹

The "sameness" of the world in which everyone operates constitutes the key constraint, on the Levine and Malpas view, to what historians can say about it. Indeed, the constraint is sufficient, on their view, to justify the Peircian view of history they allude to when they speak of historical researchers who construct various (true) historical narratives collectively approaching (historical) truth asymptotically over time.²² They purport to find their metaphysical proof in the historical pudding, in the consensus surrounding the ways in which people "actually do" individuate events and construct histories.

Are there good reasons to expect the sort of Peircian chronicle imagined by Levine and Malpas? Two sorts of reasons might be given: formal, regarding how events must be specified, and material, regarding the evidence available to support any proposed narrative. But there are, as a matter of fact, no formal conditions in place that do the job. Scientific method leaves underdetermination in place.²³ Indeed, historical practices, past and present, generate the problems of interpretation under discussion.²⁴ There is no basis in fact or in theory for the contention that historical research does or eventually must result in the sort of convergence they hypothesize. The suggestion by Levine and Malpas that historical research actually exhibits the qualities they celebrate is at best jejune.

The following two cases illustrate that formal and material conditions are not determinative in historical practice. The first involves debates over the question of how scientists decide in favor of one view as opposed to another in cases of experimental conflict. Contrasting accounts of the sorts of factors that are determinative of the conclusions scientists reach can be found, for example, in Andrew Pickering's *Constructing Quarks*, on the one hand, and Peter Galison's *How Experiments End*, on the other. Pickering and Galison offer competing explanations of the reasons for the shift within the high-energy physics community to quantum chromodynamics. Pickering infamously declares that "in principle, the decisions which produce the world are free and unconstrained. They could be made at random, each scientist choosing by the toss of a coin at each decision point what stance to adopt."²⁵ Galison, in opposition to this "the calculus of interests explains all" view of scientists' choices, protests that at least some scientists do not appear to choose conclusions in this fashion.²⁶ But matters are more complicated than this. For, Galison observes, given the normative question at issue—ought scientists to have been persuaded by the evidence available to them—the norms deemed relevant will vary from group to group. He observes that "by now it should be no surprise that criteria that satisfy people *inside* an experiment can differ from those used by scientists (or

philosophers) judging from the outside."²⁷ There is no summing of these narratives; they are inconsistent.

Is there a "master" perspective, an "ideal" account regarding how the facts connect? But what would count in this case as "telling it like it was"? Grasping at metaphysical straws does not allow Levine and Malpas to construct an argument that, in the proliferation of actual accounts, there *must* be one that constitutes "telling it like it was," which connects the facts in "the" right way. As the *Rashomon* case also suggested, there is no warrant for the view that facts must always be determinative in the manner Levine and Malpas require.

A second example concerns a debate surrounding the historical significance and understanding of the Holocaust that went on in the mid-1980s (in the shadow of the *Historikerstreit*).²⁸ The particular dispute instructive for our purposes was between a prominent German historian of Nazi period, Martin Broszat, and a distinguished Israeli historian, Saul Friedländer.²⁹ Broszat argues for the priority of a history of the period 1933–1945 that does not center on the madness of the Nazis and the crimes they committed. Rather, he urges, the focus should be on the underlying "normalcy" of everyday life during this period.

The German historian too will certainly accept that Auschwitz—due to its singular significance—functions in retrospect as the central event of the Nazi period. Yet qua scientist and scholar, he cannot readily accept that Auschwitz also be made, after the fact, into the cardinal point, the hinge on which the entire factual complex of historical events of the Nazi period turns.³⁰

Broszat's suggestion, in short, is that without trying or intending to minimize the horror or criminality of the Nazi regime, good portions of the history of Germany for the period in question could be told, as it were, without reference to that regime. "Historicization" means, in this context, situating German history from 1933 to 1945 within a larger narrative than the frame demanded by the political realities of that period.

Friedländer vehemently protests against the acceptability of this way of structuring the narrative. One cannot, he insists, speak of the "normalcy" of this era. He will grudgingly allow talk only of the "perception of normalcy." For Friedländer, "this 'historicization' . . . could mean not so much a widening of the picture, as a *shift of focus*."³¹ Friedländer goes on to observe that, inter alia, claims of the "normalcy" of everyday life for this period cannot be fused with that of its victims.³²

This type of perspective necessarily will differ considerably from that belonging to another group—and above all from the perspective of the victims. Almost by definition, we have differing emphases, differing foci in the general descriptions of that epoch. What might be viewed as a kind of "fusion of horizons" is not in sight.³³

The horizons of the “ordinary German” and that of the victims of the Nazi regime cannot be “fused,” though each could tell true narratives—one of normalcy, one of extraordinary horrors. Friedländer believes that a moral choice underlies choice of narrative strategy here. But no one imagines that there is some master narrative giving the God’s-eye view of the master race. There are only competing, conflicting perspectives to choose among.

The two examples consist of cases in which the conflicts are between contemporaries, and the evidence is not what is in dispute. I have gone into such detail because, in the face of claims such as those made by Levine and Malpas, all one can do is consider actual cases and ask whether their hypothesis regarding an Ideal Chronicler’s “view from nowhere” makes any sense. Whatever they mean by their appeal to the “same” world or to whatever they imagine the “norms” of historical research to be, the constraints on interpretation do not function as they contend. Neither material nor formal factors lead to anything like convergences of interpretation or even the reasonable expectation of such convergences. The view from nowhere required for the Levine and Malpas conception of an object of understanding remains not just undefined but indefinable.

2. Narrative Realism: A Myth of the Given

But there is a different account of the objectivity of understanding, which, it might appear, does not rely on misplaced confidence in the necessity of description or the constraining effects of method and evidence. This would be a structuralist account that locates the unity of events in the intention guiding the action. Intention structures action, and this structure constitutes the touchstone for correct understanding. Like Levine and Malpas, David Carr wants to reject any suggestions that “our experience of life does not itself necessarily have the form of narrative, except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories.”³⁴ For Carr protests, the alleged bifurcation between lived experience and narrative structure is “totally false.”³⁵

The asserted discontinuity between experience and narrative is thoroughly mistaken, Carr argues, because acts necessarily have a narrative structure: “Narrative activity . . . is a constitutive part of action.”³⁶ That is, insofar as the lives people lead consist of actions (intentionally directed behavior), these lives possess by virtue of that fact an intrinsic coherence that provides a narrative structure. In turn, this very narrative structure constitutes an object of understanding for historians, at least with regard to constituting the “actual” meaning of the experience for an agent. “Narrative, in our view, lies in the objects of historical research, not merely in its own manner of writing about these objects.”³⁷ Although Levine and Malpas cite Carr with approval,³⁸ Carr’s own metaphysical assumption argues only for a narrative structure inhering in the intention-action linkage.

Carr’s argument is disarmingly straightforward. Our intentions give various bits of our behavior a special unity and coherence. Acts, on this view, transcend the moment; they refer both backward and forward in time. As with Levine and Malpas, Carr maintains that to observe an action is to see the connectedness of movements over time.

But if one grants only the capacity for action, then, Carr believes, this entails that narrative structure is an intrinsic part of lived experience. Agents are authors; they construct the story of their lives.

The essence of deliberative activity is to anticipate the future and lay out the whole action as a unified sequence of steps and stages, interlocking means and ends. . . . My point is simply that action seems to involve, indeed quite essentially, the adoption of an anticipated future-retrospective point of view on the present. . . . What I am saying, then, is that we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-tellers’ position with respect to our own lives. . . . Such narrative activity, even apart from its social role, is a constitutive part of action, and not just an embellishment, commentary, or other incidental accompaniment.³⁹

The extended temporal structure of action suffices to imbue action with a narrative structure—to make it a causally connected sequence that explains what one is doing and why. For Carr, the inference is immediate; the structure of action is a narrative structure.

Lives possess a narrative structure prior to any explicit telling. That is, lives are not organized by a process of articulating what was done, but merely in the living.

Furthermore, narrative structure refers not only to such a play of points of view but also to the organizational features of the events themselves. . . . We maintain that all these structures and organizational features pertain to everyday experience and action whether or not the narrative structure or the act of narrative structuring takes the form of explicit verbalization.⁴⁰

Carr plausibly takes his central contentions to be undeniable, namely, people plan, people act, and their actions are (often enough, anyway) in rough accord with such intentions and plans. But, Carr maintains, this is all that is needed to establish that narrative structure is not made but found; not imposed on lives but borrowed “from their source.”⁴¹

Discontinuity theorists (Carr’s term for those who see a “discontinuity” between the lived and the narrated) imagine that one occupies the story-teller’s position vis-à-vis action only retrospectively. That is why Carr suggests they maintain that stories are not lived but told. But according to Carr, the mistake of discontinuity theorists is basic, residing in a failure to understand the nature of lived experience. For what they somehow miss is the fact that all of us “are constantly striving, with more or less success, to

occupy the story-teller's position with respect to our own actions."⁴² By virtue of occupying the position of the narrator of our own stories, we are also able to be the explainers of our own actions. On Carr's account, we can explain ourselves retrospectively because we prospectively author our acts. Intentionality provides an intrinsic narrative structure, making possible an explanation of what was done and why.

If Carr is correct, the claims made by discontinuity theorists must be directly contrary to their own experience. But what then could ever have prompted discontinuity theorists like Mink or White to claim otherwise, that is, that stories are not lived but told?

Some philosophical history regarding the notion of explanation is needed here. Narratives were held (by theorists of explanation such as Hempel or Nagel) not to be proper scientific explanations because scientific explanations required laws (or high probability generalizations). Laws were taken to be the engine of explanation because they are critical to explanatorily "connecting" particular happenings by allowing the deducibility of the *explanandum* from the *explanans*. Historians, in contrast, often explain by telling a story that provides reasons or circumstances particular to a certain time and place. What appears to link the reasons given or circumstances cited to the event to be explained is the filter of the historian (and that person's audience) rather than, as scientific explanation was taken to require, taking initial conditions as triggering law-governed connections. Given this understanding of what science is and what explanation requires, to explain by a narrative is not to explain at all.

The terms of the original critique presumed the only inferential license certified for scientific explanation required laws, and so narratives failed as explanations. Discussion of "narrative form as a cognitive instrument" (Mink's phrase) arises explicitly in reaction to demarcation criteria for scientific explanation that ascribe nonexplanatory status to (narrative) historical explanation. The salient point is that the debate about the legitimacy of narrative explanation is one of how to understand its logical form, and so the licensing of inferential/causal connections.

What is ironic is that as challenges to the scientific status of narrative waned, debate revived and intensified among narrativist theorists regarding the objectivity of narrative explanations.⁴³ For the status of the assumption of "the past" as an independent object of understanding—"the past" as constituting an independent and knowable realm of investigation—has increasingly been viewed as problematic. The evolution of debate in historiography has been from a confidence in the historian's ability to provide an account of the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen* to the view of the historian as a novelist manqué.⁴⁴ Histories on this view are more made than found.

What led narrative antirealists to deny the assumption of the past as some fixed object that a historian may hope to reconstruct or re-create? One central issue here involves the different sort of empirically equivalent stories qua explanations that can be mounted in narrative dress. As Hayden White⁴⁵ emphasizes, there is no fact of the matter to questions of narrative type, for example, "can the Holocaust only be portrayed as a tragedy?"⁴⁶ White's analyses of the tropes by which narratives may be constructed offer striking evidence for his claim that the choice of the "mode of emplotment" is not constrained by facts but is the historian's doing.

Moreover, when Mink argues for narrative form as a cognitive instrument, he is arguing for it as a form of explanation that is on all fours with the very different type of theoretical explanation familiar from the natural sciences. Narrative, his suggestion goes, is just one of the basic ways that creatures with cognitive faculties like ours have of organizing and representing information for ourselves. "Narrative form as it is exhibited in both history and fiction is particularly important as a rival to theoretical explanation or understanding. Theory [a formalized natural scientific account] makes possible the explanation of an occurrence only by describing it in such a way that the description is logically related to a systematic set of generalizations or laws."⁴⁷ Just as a scientific theory lets us pick out from experience what is relevant to the causal chain given what we are interested in explaining, so too a narrative represents a selective identification and construction of a causal story.

Mink, White, and others assume that narratives are "constructed" just as explanations in science are "constructed," that is, against a background of beliefs that already inform investigators in a general way what could possibly count as a cause. Narrative antirealism considered from this perspective takes familiar form as a type of Quinean/Duhemian holism, a mode of theorizing about experience in which "experience" is mediated through a background of other beliefs. So conceived, the voice of narrative in the conversation of humankind, for Mink and others, is one that speaks through a theoretically informed understanding of how the world works.

However, discussion of narrative as a form of explanation raises, as Mink so clearly recognizes, the problem of narrative form all over again, albeit in somewhat different dress than the problem took in the debate noted earlier. For even if one grants with Mink (and the narrative realists) that narratives explain, there emerges an interesting and important *disanalogy* between narrative and more familiar forms of scientific explanation. It is this. The clear reason to favor formalization in accounts of theory structure and explanation is that what makes for "good" or "proper" deductive connections is well-known and understood. But there is no correspondingly well-articulated account specifying the "proper" form of a narrative explanation. Mink puts it this way:

In the critical philosophy of history, narrative has increasingly come to be regarded as a type of explanation different from and displacing scientific or "covering-law" explanation of actions and events. But one result has been the emergence of problems not even recognized before. There is, for example, the problem of explicating how a narrative structure determines what is or is not relevant to it; this problem has no analogue in the explication of the structure of theories.⁴⁸

No formal criterion for narrative structure stands as an analogue to derivability in formal models of scientific explanation. The problem is not that narrative fails a test imposed by some nonnarrative criterion for licensing causal connections. Rather, the issue is that it has none of its own to offer.

This absence of any clear criterion for "correct" narrative structure—for specifying licit means of "inferring" one event from another—helps motivate the antirealist view. For if the question of what defines an acceptable narrative inference has no general answer, then within "accepted" narrative histories there is, in White's apt phrase, an "embarrassment of plot." What dictates the plot structure—the way matters connect—must, it seems, come from the mind of the historian and the culture of which that person is a part. What else constrains or makes plausible narrative structure? In this respect, narrative explanations owe their credibility to how experience is conceptualized and/or theorized. They yield "the odor of the ideal."⁴⁹ Answers to the question of "how things connect" appear to be a function of a historian's imaginative abilities, narrativizing skills, and cultural resources.

In Carr's writing the discontinuity theorists seem to view life as a kind of buzzing, booming cacophony until narratives are overlaid (*ex post experientia*) on them.⁵⁰ But Carr's efforts to position narrative antirealism as a reductionist foil to his more authentic "holistic" account of lived experience are completely misplaced. What happens, rather, is that Carr confuses discontinuity theorists' puzzlement with why we accept some narratives and not others with the claim that our lives lack structure for us. But he has matters exactly backward. Carr's appeal to the "self-evidence" of explanations of actions is part of the problem with which antirealists start, not the discovery of a solution.

The epistemological positions are thus the opposite of what Carr claims. For it is Carr who stakes out a foundationalist position with his claims for the privileged explanatory positions of agents. The point at issue, which Carr just misses, is how to understand what informs the structuring of a narrative so that it is open to rational debate and evaluation. It is at this point—discerning what licenses the linkages that a narrative imputes—that the real debate begins.

Taken as a debate on the legitimate structure of a narrative explanation, what is to be made of Carr's challenge to discontinuity theorists? What drives Carr's argument to the conclusion that Mink and others are

operating with a "totally false distinction"⁵¹ is the asserted necessary structural link between the intentionality of action and its narrative form. For Carr, this structural connection is assured by the very meaning of the notion of action. Action is by definition intentional, and intentionality is the glue uniting behaviors into actions and actions into lives with narrative structures.

Carr takes the inference from action to narrative structure to be immediate, a consequence of what it means to be an agent. It appears to require no more than to acknowledge that we can explain the actions because we authored them. But we no longer need be gulled by this argument. Its very transparency creates a question instead of supplying an answer. How does the prospective structure of action fit with narrative structure qua explanation? Do intentions always or necessarily explain actions?

Consider, in this regard, what Carr's view seemingly implies with respect to the question of whether one can learn from experience what one's intentions are (or were). Can reflection on experience reveal that we were just wrong or mistaken in our assessment of our own prior intentions? Surely the general answer here is yes. Yet Carr's a priori argument appears to have the odd consequence that we cannot learn about ourselves from experience. For learning about ourselves from experience requires that there would have to be just a contingent connection between what we take, at any given moment, our intentions to be and what, upon reflection, we see that they more likely were. But Carr clearly holds that the agent must hold the narrator's perspective on her own life and that this perspective explains the agent's actions. Yet only if one allows for a discontinuity between intention and action is learning about oneself from experience possible.

Carr is not simply unclear but quite possibly inconsistent regarding the question of the extent to which an agent's status as narrator of his or her own life—a point on which he repeatedly and emphatically insists—is compatible with the revisability of accounts. We may rewrite the past, he acknowledges, in the light of new experience.

It may indeed be true that historical research will often penetrate to causal connections among events and actions (particularly psychological or economic connections) which were hidden from the historical agents themselves. But this is not to deny that these agents lived in a narrative fashion; it is just to say that *their* story of what they were doing must be revised or indeed replaced by a better one.⁵²

But he fails to consider how this possibility impacts his claims that agents necessarily occupy the narrator's role with regard to their own actions. "Better" in this passage concerns the relative assessment of "causal connections." Recall that for Mink the issue is narrative as a theorized form of ex-

planation and the inferential connections within a narrative so conceived. But if that is so, Carr surrenders the very point in contention by declaring that "*their* (i.e., agents') story of what they were doing must be revised or indeed replaced by a better one." For Carr reinserts the key discontinuity—that between the explanation of a narrator and that of an agent—which he previously claimed to deny. By allowing the agent's intentions to go one way and the causes of action another, Carr renders otiose his key claim that the narrative structure of action is a consequence of agency.

So far, I have only challenged Carr's "continuity" claim, that is, the alleged explanatory link of intention to action and the implications of this for narrative structure. But there is a still more general problem with Carr's conception of the relation of action and narrative. This is the fact that it is simply false to claim as he does that it is a necessary feature of experience that one finds a narrative unity in it.

How can one assess Carr's claim that, in general, life is experienced as having a narrative structure? Since historical explanation is the immediate focus, let us take a biography as one case study. Consider, in this regard, Gitta Sereny's justly celebrated biography of Franz Stangl.⁵³ Sereny documents Stangl's march through the Nazi hierarchy of extermination, from his early position as a "middle manager" in the T-4 eugenics program to his efficient overseeing of Treblinka (where about 1.2 million Jews were gassed in a seventeen-month period). Much of this account is in Stangl's own terms, based on the author's extensive interviews with him.

How does Stangl see the evolution of his own career and his role in the various programs of death in which he participated? Well, for example, Stangl explains his decision to accept the position in the T-4 program in terms of wishing to avoid working under someone he disliked. Similar sorts of explanations are provided for his actions in assuming the post at Treblinka as well. There was no plan; there was no intention to become overseer of the most efficient death camp in history. Options were offered, decisions were made, posts were accepted—one damn thing after another. Stangl lives a chronicle, not a narrative.

Stangl explains his actions in terms of what he needed to do to provide for his family, advance his career, or avoid working under difficult superiors. But his succession of positions does not, in his view, constitute a narrative, an explanation in the form of a story. His "narrative" is one of frustrated ambition; what he wanted was to become a combat officer. In any case, "wanting a career" provides neither for an anticipation of what Stangl did nor even, as he admits, an explanation of his particularly heinous actions.

In Stangl's case, his conversations with Sereny led to a highly dramatic moment. He died of heart failure less than a day after the conversation Sereny records.

"My conscience is clear about what I did myself," he said, in the same stiffly spoken words he had used countless times at his trial, and in the past weeks, when we had always come back to this subject, over and over again. But this time I said nothing. He paused and waited, but the room remained silent. "I have never intentionally hurt anyone, myself," he said, with a different, less incisive emphasis, and waited again—for a long time. For the first time, in all these many days, I had given him no help. There was no more time. He gripped the table with both hands as if he was holding on to it. "But I was there," he said then, in a curiously dry and tired tone of resignation. These few sentences had taken almost half an hour to pronounce. "So yes," he said finally, very quietly, "in reality I share the guilt. . . . Because my guilt . . . my guilt . . . only now in these talks . . . now that I have talked about it all for the first time." . . . He stopped.

He had pronounced the words "my guilt"; but more than the words, the finality of it was in the sagging of his body, and on his face.

After more than a minute he started again, a half-hearted attempt, in a dull voice. "My guilt," he said, "is that I am still here. That is my guilt."⁵⁴

"Now that I have talked about it all for the first time." Stangl arrives at an eleventh-hour reassessment of his actions. He had cast himself as a character amid events not in his control, to which he could only react. When matters are not in one's control, one cannot bear responsibility for what happens. But that is the account Stangl comes to believe is false. He learns (or finally admits) something about himself not previously acknowledged.

Stangl's case is a particularly dramatic one, involving events and actions that seemingly defy explanation. But the philosophical points here are quite general. For one, there is a sharp discordance between what wants explaining—the willingness to aid and abet the murder of over a million people whom he had no particular reason to murder—and the self-ascribed actions of the individual. Simply put, the intentions fail to come close to explaining the actions.⁵⁵ Second, and contrary to the type of entailment relationship that Carr claims must exist between action and narrative, while Stangl's life is replete with actions of one sort or another, it lacks, in his telling of it anyway, any narrative quality. It is a chronicle of events he lives through.

The explanatory structure, if such there is, is invisible to him. For him, life is a series of postings and tasks, not a story lived out. The structure of some greater intentions—to advance his career, to keep out of trouble, to protect his wife and children from the hardships of the war—which Stangl ascribes to himself do not yield *in advance* any anticipation of his actions. From the fact that an act is intentional, it does not follow (i.e., is in no sense entailed) that the intention "explains" the action in terms of giving an understandable reason for it. It does not even give it narrative structure in some looser sense of "narrative." There is no story, no plot, no unfolding of a coherent picture forged by intentions and consequent actions.

Consider in this regard Christopher Browning's stunning portrait of German execution squads in Poland⁵⁶ based on archived interviews with members of the squads. One is hard-pressed in this, as in other cases of Holocaust historiography, to locate either an individual or a "collective" intention (whatever that is)⁵⁷ to, for example, effect a "Final Solution." Browning's reserve policemen are, as Browning stresses, ordinary men and not ideologues or hard-bitten anti-Semites. Why did they kill? Browning ultimately adverts to Milgram-like explanations of behavior, explanations notably devoid of any straightforward linking of individual intentions with the actions to be explained. If, in Stangl's case, intentions are not explanatory of the actions, in Browning's study what explains, if anything does, is the apparent absence of intentions (or the will) to do otherwise. Yet, in all cases, one is looking at actions—voluntary behavior. Carr's claims to the contrary notwithstanding, there is simply no inconsistency as a matter of experience or of logic in ascribing both agency and a nonnarrative structure to experience.

A final point is that the owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk. Prospectively, one may have hopes, but only retrospectively does one know enough to fashion a story: that is, whether the intentions, plans, goals, or ambitions one says one has, the reasons one claims for actions, are in fact the reasons that plausibly explain one's actions are learned, if at all, in retrospect. The notions of self-fulfilling prophecies, self-defeating actions, false consciousness, unconscious motives, and so on are all testimony to the generally recognized disjunction between how people may characterize what they are doing and what is taken to be the explanation of what is being done, or even what their intentions "really" are.

Carr's failure to consider actual historical cases leaves it to a priori argument to show that life is narrativized in the living. But examination of actual cases confutes any claim of this sort; the link Carr asserts must be there simply is not. Intentions do not necessarily explain or provide narrative structure to individual actions. Moreover, appeals to intentions must be weighed against other factors even in the explanation and assessment of individual actions. In addition, self-understanding characteristically alters over time, as Stangl's case dramatically illustrates. What "actually" happened takes different shapes on different tellings, even for the individual whose life it is. It is a symptom of the problem with narrative, not its cure, to boldly declare that intentions "explain" actions. The a priori entailment between intention, action, and narrative structure does not obtain. The disanalogy Mink stresses between narrative and scientific explanation underscores the fact that for the latter cases but not the former we have a well-informed theoretical understanding of which factors to favor as causes.

Because Carr commits himself a priori to the "transparency" of intentions as the causes of actions, he blinds himself to the actual complexity of

linking intentions to explanations. Carr imagines the dispute to reside in what in fact all parties in this debate take for granted—narratives as a nonreductive mode of explanation—and takes for granted what is in fact problematic—knowledge of what shapes and informs our imputed understanding of the causes of action, for ourselves or others.

3. Historical Naturalism: Dualisms Lost, the World Regained

My strategy for undermining philosophic distinctions between types of science has been to argue that there is no good reason to believe that meanings (and related notions) are something fixed, settled, or determinate, objects to be retrieved by diligent investigation. My pluralism reflects my skepticism regarding the existence of determinate demarcation criteria that give a universal, fixed meaning to "scientific method" or "rational inquiry."⁵⁸ Thus, on my view, the sciences cannot be divided by kinds (e.g., natural versus social, hard versus soft) based on essentially differing ends of inquiry (explanation versus understanding) or essentially differing methods (nomothetic versus ideographic).

My naturalism together with my critiques of "meaning realism"⁵⁹ have, some claim, the unintended consequence of reinvigorating the alleged distinction between the *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*. This would be ironic inasmuch as this is a distinction I took these critiques (including those in the first two sections) to undercut. Does, in fact, the strategy animating the criticisms rehearsed in the first two sections ultimately reinforce a distinction I seek to reject?

The problem arises for me, the suggestion goes, because my rejection of meanings has not been thoroughgoing enough. The problem is this: Skepticism regarding meaning is justified, on my view, because there are no reasons legitimating the assumption of such objects to theorize about. However, I make no parallel sort of criticisms of object-positing schemes in the natural sciences. That is, the objects of natural science are, on the Quinean view to which I subscribe, underdetermined but not indeterminate. But what makes objects of one sort a less fit subject of speculation than objects of the other? *How, in other words, can I deny theories of understanding their objects and yet hold that there is no distinction between the Geisteswissenschaften and Naturwissenschaften?* Insofar as the social sciences aim at "objects of understanding" and I claim that there are no such objects, I have seemingly posited a metaphysical distinction in kind while denying a methodological one.

Joseph Rouse presses this apparent puzzle regarding my position with particular force and clarity. Rouse charges that a residual empiricism in my account of Quinean indeterminacy engenders the unwanted consequence

from my view that "the difference between theories about the publicly available world, and theories about meanings, conforms to the difference between the natural and social sciences."⁶⁰ Rouse proposes a revision in my account that he believes preserves my argument for the indeterminacy but invokes no invidious metaphysical distinctions between types of sciences.

The account of Quinean indeterminacy I put forward and Rouse endorses sees indeterminacy as a result of the fact that all there is to meaning must be in the public sphere. There are intersubjectively available cues, there are interpretations, but there is nothing to meaning "beyond" evidence and interpretation, no "fact of the matter" to which evidence and interpretation points, so to speak.

Exactly where my argument goes off track, on Rouse's view, is when I infer from the centrality of intersubjectivity to the conclusion that appeals to the world have some special evidentiary status that appeals to meaning cannot. My argument licensing this inference is predicated on the "paradox of language learning," that is, the problem of how, given holistic assumptions about evidence and meaning, it is possible to learn language.⁶¹ The paradox focuses on what I take to be the "purest" case of Quinean radical translation, namely, an infant learning his or her first language, for an infant has no prior theory to serve as a basis for forming genuine or analytical hypotheses. Translation thus proceeds against the most minimal background of beliefs. And if the language-world relation is holistic, then the paradox arises straightforwardly. Infants are observed learning language only a sentence or term at a time, but, *ex hypothesi*, sentences and terms, in isolation from the larger language/theory of which they are a part, have no meaning. So learning language under these circumstances would seem an impossible task. But, of course, most infants do. Hence the apparent paradox.

I suggest (following Quine) that the resolution to the paradox resides in some initial way of cuing utterances with the environment. Specifically, the paradox is only resolved because some initially learned sentences serve a function akin to the one Quine attributes to observation sentences. Thus it is that infants, though lacking a prior theory, nevertheless succeed in coordinating with teachers certain sounds or gestures and shared features of the environment. It would otherwise be inconceivable how they could enter the web of belief.⁶²

But, Rouse contends, my argument here is tantamount to assigning special ontological status to a "shared" environment. Rather, there are only conventions for making oneself understood. "Social practice and public world are inextricable, and this is what Roth's argument from the conditions for language learning should once again teach us. . . . The ability to correlate utterances and the surrounding world is constitutive of their being utterances at all."⁶³ Although I draw the moral that the natural and social sci-

ences must share a common explanatory focus, Rouse reads this as a privileging of the domain usually associated with the natural sciences—the object domain—over that usually associated with the social sciences—meaning or understanding. By allowing a fact of the matter to one but not the other, the unwanted divide allegedly creeps into my epistemological account.

If there is no prior domain of meanings, Rouse suggests, then there is no prior domain of objects either. Rouse's "practices" account, to the contrary, would have it that "there is no fact of the matter about who is a competent speaker of language, beyond determining whom other speakers (themselves of contestable identity) will recognize as competent speakers."⁶⁴ Rouse concludes that the objects of all domains are by-products of social circumstances and interactions.

This conclusion, in turn, leads Rouse to maintain that what is explanatorily basic of communication is the fact that, from the outset, it is a relation of those in positions of unequal power. "Language learning is a form of social interaction which does not occur between social equals. . . . There is no publicly available check on the correctness overall of the teachers' utterances (it is important here that the role of the teacher is filled collectively by those whose speech the learner seeks to master for herself)."⁶⁵ *Relations of unequal power fill the role in Rouse's account that appeal to general environmental cues occupies in mine.* Power relations ground his theory of meaning.

Are appeals to notions of "social practices" in general and power relations in particular explanatory of how communication is achieved?⁶⁶ By way of assessing whether or not Rouse's invocation of social practices for explanatory purposes is compelling, a key issue is whether an appeal to practice resolves "the paradox of language learning." For Rouse, however the infant learns, the power differential in the teacher-learner relation must somehow account for that infant's entering wedge into language.

Yet [it] is also unacceptable to take that shared environment as securing a domain of "objective evidence" in any sense that would escape negotiation; the identification of evidence within that shared environment, along with its employment for the sake of furthering the practices of inquiry, is an ineliminable social activity that cannot be fixed by any determinate fact of the matter, whether physiological or behavioral.⁶⁷

That is, while I allow only the study of intersubjectively available environmental cues for purposes of legitimate explanation and evidence, Rouse for his part allows only socially mediated negotiations to be explanatory of what there is. Rouse would explain any shared world on the basis of relations of power and the associated practices. We differ, in short, with regard to what to take as explanatorily basic. Indeed, Rouse reacts to the paradox by assimilating the natural sciences to the social.

By way of illustrating a question about Rouse's power approach to meaning, consider Victor Klemperer's powerful and arresting diary of his life as a Jew in Nazi Germany.⁶⁸ One might take Klemperer's situation as a type of paradigm of powerlessness. Klemperer can only "bear witness," that is, record what he experiences and observes. He occupies an observer's role to his own life precisely because he has ceased to be able to structure it or explain what is going on.

Klemperer's case bears on Rouse's position in the following way. If Rouse is correct, then such severe asymmetries in power relations should, it seems, determine what meanings both parties impute to experience inasmuch as, in Rouse's view, power relations are determinative of meaning. But this is not what we find happening. If Rouse was right, I am suggesting, tensions and problems experienced by Klemperer (or imagined by Orwell in 1984) ought not to occur. Granted, Klemperer (or Orwell's Winston) is not an infant, but what applies to an infant should apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to adults. But it is precisely because we identify the distorting effects of power and contrast them against other sorts of experience that the notion of meaning cannot be fully cashed out in terms of power relations as Rouse suggests.

On my account, language remains keyed to a shared environment, and it is on this shared environment that all inquiry should focus in order to have a fact of the matter. My naturalism represents favoritism not among *types* of objects—physical versus mental—but in the order or direction of explanation—public versus private, social versus individual. My naturalism has latter notions in each pair explained in terms of the former, and this because naturalism in its turn is constrained by meaning holism. It is not, as Rouse imagines, that I give to natural science a domain of objects I deny to the social sciences. A naturalized epistemology need not privilege any particular domain of objects or methods as paradigmatic but is free to draw from all disciplines. Naturalism leaves open the question of what to recognize as a science.

Thus, in the end the difference between Rouse and me is not that I divide the sciences by kind according to domain but that I naturalize all inquiry and thus explain both domains—social and natural—relative to a shared world. The charge that I traffic in a privileged domain of objects can be seen as misplaced, for my notion of "shared environment" is metaphysically empty. On my account, the notion of sharing can only be cashed out intratheoretically, and our current best way of understanding "sharing" is empirical. But this latter claim I view as itself contingent, and so open to revision.

We seek understanding. But from this it does not follow that there is a thing to be sought—the object of understanding.⁶⁹

Notes

1. Since one way of defining "understanding" might be "the recovery or appreciation of meaning," it should come as no surprise to discover, as I argue, that the notion of understanding is as "myth eaten" as the notion of meaning. The views of understanding criticized in this essay parallel the "unchallenged assumptions" of theory of meaning that Hilary Putman identifies (1975, p. 219).

2. Throughout I speak of understanding as a mode of explanation. The tradition of contrasting explanation and understanding presumes a certain notion of scientific explanation, specifically one that stipulated the citing laws as a condition of explanation. "Understanding" connoted offering just reasons peculiar to and only operative within particular contexts. But reasons without laws did not qualify as an explanation. While acknowledging that types of explanation differ with regard to what is formally necessary to establish a causal connection, I find no reason now to exclude understanding from the domain of explanation.

3. Levine and Malpas 1994, hereafter cited as L&M; Levine 1991, hereafter cited as L.

4. The following works by Carr are considered: Carr 1986a; 1986b; 1985.

5. Iggers 1997, p. 3. The alternatives represented by these authors are not mutually exclusive. The primary difference is that for Carr, the structure is provided by the intentions of agents, but the source of event structure in L&M includes Carr's views but seems to encompass some type of agent-independent conception as well.

6. In an earlier essay (Roth 1988), I argued against what I there termed the "metaphysical objection" to taking narrative as a legitimate mode of historical explanation. The core of this objection as I then imagined it held that narrative form was not open to verification, and so narrative could not be an appropriate mode for historical explanations. Although I replied to the objection in that article, I have since become aware of ways in which my reply is incomplete. Other important variants of the metaphysical assumption remained untouched. These are my focus below.

7. L&M, p. 154.

8. First published in 1965 in Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History*; the book has been republished in a revised edition, Danto 1985. See, for example, Danto 1985, pp. 148–149 on the Ideal Chronicler and the Ideal Chronicle.

9. L&M criticize a number of the antirealist arguments that I offer. Most puzzling is their dismissal of my argument from the underdetermination of theories. The puzzle here is in their reason for dismissing it. They agree that theories "will always be underdetermined by the evidence" (p. 164) but they go on to claim that such theories "could well be treated as simply translations of each other, in which case there is no reason to treat them as incompatible" (p. 164). They cite Quine as their authority for the suggestion that underdetermined theories are intertranslatable (p. 164 n. 28). Yet Quine, even in the sources L&M cite, takes underdetermination as a problem only because it can engender logical incompatibility between theories despite their being empirically equivalent. That competing theories cannot always or even characteristically be treated as translations of one another,

that is, are logically incompatible, is stressed by Quine in the very passage (Quine 1960) cited by L&M. Incompatibility arises because empirical equivalence does not ensure sameness of meaning for terms in the theories. Quine considers the point L&M raise, only to reject it. "It may be protested that when two theories agree thus in point of all possible sensory determinants they are in an important sense not two but one" (p. 78). But this "protest" is *not*, as Quine goes on to make clear, one he accepts. He does not accept it because of "its glibness on the topic of meaning." For given the "empirical slack" between available evidence and imputed meaning, *ex hypothesi* there is no fact of the matter regarding which of two incompatible meanings is to be deemed correct. The question of whether or not there is an additional problem here regarding indeterminacy of translation (and I believe, following Quine, that there is) need not be answered in order to see that L&M simply misread Quine regarding the necessary reconcilability of empirically equivalent theories.

10. L&M also charge that failure to ascribe the requisite sort of realism to events leads into some "anti-realist metaphysic," which would leave one unable, in their view, to distinguish between, for example, Holocaust denial and its alternatives. "Without such a notion [as an ideal chronicle], or some correlate, one is left without any notion of error in history; without any possibility of distinguishing historical fact from historical fiction; without any chance of distinguishing correct recollection from false" (p. 162). No argument is provided as to why the only alternatives are either a realist metaphysics of history or a complete inability to distinguish error or falsehood. Moreover, this way of posing the alternatives surely is false. Clearly, antirealists can have notions of error, and they discern error in the usual way, for example, on the basis of the available evidence. Metaphysical issues go one way, epistemic go another. In what follows, I concern myself only with arguments that are raised in support of their metaphysical claims.

11. L&M, p. 161.

12. L&M, p. 170; L, p. 236.

13. L&M, p. 161.

14. An example would be to contrast the nonnarrative statement "the king died and then the queen died" with the narrative "the king's dying caused the queen to die." Narrative requires something more than a sequence of acts or events; whatever else narrative requires, there must be some linking of the events. Otherwise random sequences would count as narratives. For example, water dripping from a faucet has a temporal order but no narrative one. Regarding narrative and time, consider the following example (owing to Hemingway, I believe) of a mininarrative: "For Sale. Baby shoes. Never used." So temporal sequencing is neither necessary nor sufficient for a narrative.

15. This is a standard ethnographic strategy in the sociology of science. See, for example, Woolgar and Latour 1986.

16. L&M, p. 165.

17. L&M, p. 166. L&M sometimes draw succor and support for their position by their reading of Davidson's critique of the scheme-content dichotomy. Their understanding of this argument is tendentious. I try to state their position throughout without making Davidson's interpretation the issue between us.

18. As to the question of whether my argument ignores the distinction between events and their descriptions, and indeed confuses the latter with the former, the reading here imputed by L&M is belied by one of the very passages they quote (p. 164 n. 27): "My point about putative 'ideal events' . . . is that treating such events as objects independent of our object (and event) positing scheme of things runs afoul of what we know about the relation of evidence to theory." As I would have hoped this remark makes clear, the point I emphasize throughout my essay is that the objects to which our *theory* of the world commits us cannot be assumed to have some theory-independent standing. I confess that I slip between expressing the point as a theory-evidence question and as a language-world question. But in moving between "theory" and "language" in this way, I thought I was helping myself to be a familiar enough identification, and so too the corresponding issue between how we describe matters and how matters stand seen *subspecie aeternitatus*. Although this assumes a type of holism regarding language/theories, this holism is one that Quine and Davidson share. L&M seem content enough with a Davidsonian view here. In short, the issue between L&M and myself, I would have said, is one regarding the basis for imputing theory-independent status to a type of theoretical entity—an event. I do not see how my argument trades in so coarse a confusion as that between terms and the objects to which the terms refer.

19. L&M, p. 167.

20. L&M, p. 167; see also pp. 168–169.

21. L&M, pp. 170–171.

22. The argument of Levine's paper "Historical Anti-Realism" repeats the convergence argument found in L&M, including the reasons for rejecting my *Rashomon* example, discussed below. The earlier paper also insists that I fail to give due weight to "conditions of material adequacy" (p. 234), by which I understand Levine to intend what the later paper refers to as the "constraints" on theory construction. Although I do not discuss the earlier paper directly, I take my replies to the later paper to suffice, since all of Levine's arguments reappear in that later paper.

23. For an elaboration of how little is to be achieved by appeals to "scientific method," see Roth 1996.

24. Excellent accounts of the sort of disputes, past and ongoing, that wrack the historical profession can be found in Novick 1988; Wise 1980.

25. Pickering 1984, pp. 405–406.

26. See, for example, Galison 1987, p. 258.

27. Galison 1987, p. 260.

28. This provides yet another case study for those who, like L&M, argue for the convergences among historical narratives without attending to actual historiographical disputes. See, for example, Maier 1997. The controversies that interest me here have nothing to do with so-called revisionist positions or efforts at Holocaust denial, views I can only regard with contempt. Rather, vexed and fascinating conflicts persist concerning how to explain the massive complicity of people in and out of the Nazi Party, Germans and non-Germans alike, in the systematic killing. A sense of the nature, depth, and complexity of this controversy, which often enough is not a dispute about any matter of fact, can be gleaned from Moses 1998; Berenbaum and Peck 1998 (especially the articles by Christopher Browning and Daniel

Goldhagen). For a good survey of generic problems of interpretation, see Marrus 1989.

29. One reason for looking at the Broszat-Friedländer exchange, rather than the *Historikerstreit* proper, is that the sort of political allegiances that clouded much of the debate in the *Historikerstreit* are not central here. No one suggests that Broszat is motivated by a lack of antipathy for the Nazis or blinded by nationalist aspirations for West Germany. Thus this dispute is far more "academic" in tone and nature. References are from Broszat and Friedländer 1988.

30. Broszat, in Broszat and Friedländer 1988, p. 103.

31. Friedländer, in Broszat and Friedländer 1988, pp. 123, 104; also 106-107.

32. Obviously, similar questions might be raised regarding U.S. history in the pre-civil rights era. One might ask, following MacIntyre, whose normalcy, which narrative?

33. Friedländer, in Broszat and Friedländer 1988, p. 125.

34. Mink 1987, p. 187.

35. Carr 1986b, p. 125; 1986a, p. 61.

36. Carr 1986b, p. 125.

37. Carr 1986a, p. 177; see generally pp. 168ff.

38. L&M, pp. 159ff.

39. Carr 1986b, pp. 125, 126; 1986a, p. 62.

40. Carr 1986a, pp. 62, 49-52, 90-91; 1985, p. 121.

41. Carr 1985, p. 121.

42. Carr 1986a, p. 61.

43. The publication of White 1973 marks the moment when narrative antirealism becomes a philosophical force in historiography.

44. Consider, in this regard, Georg Iggers's apposite comment: "The idea that objectivity in historical research is not possible because there is no object of history has gained increasing currency." Iggers 1997, p. 9. See, relatedly, Berkhofer 1997.

45. For a helpful overview and elaboration of White's views, see Kannsteiner 1993.

46. Criticisms of White on just this point, that is, the "correctness" of alternative emplotments of the history of the Holocaust, can be found in Friedländer 1992. See especially the essays by Perry Anderson, Christopher Browning, Carlo Ginzburg, Martin Jay, and Hayden White.

47. Mink 1987, p. 185.

48. Mink 1987, p. 187.

49. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in White 1987, p. 21.

50. Carr 1986a, pp. 65-66.

51. Carr 1986a, p. 61.

52. Carr 1986a, p. 177. See also p. 99.

53. Sereny 1983.

54. Sereny 1983, p. 364, ellipses in the original.

55. Henry Friedländer, author of the authoritative study of the executions of more than 70,000 Aryans carried out in the T-4 program, remarks, "When all is said and done, I am still unable to fathom why seemingly normal men and women were able to commit such extraordinary crimes. Neither ideology nor self-interest is

a satisfactory explanation for such behavior" (H. Friedländer, "The T-4 Killers," in Berenbaum and Peck 1998, p. 249). Consider the following quotes cited in Browning 1992, garnered from interviews with German reservists who had participated in bloody mass shootings in Poland. "Truthfully I must say that at the time we didn't reflect about it at all. Only years later did any of us become conscious of what had happened then. . . . Only later did it first occur to me that it had not been right" (p. 72). Compare this with the following explanation. "I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened that the mother led the children by the hand. My neighbor then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer" (p. 73). Both remarks, each in its own way, poses a chilling counterbalance to Carr's readiness to connect intention and action, on the one hand, and explanation and narrative, on the other. For the intentions seem either irrelevant to efforts at understanding ("we didn't reflect," "only years later did any of us become conscious") or opaque to normal capacities for understanding (the "reason" rationalizing the shooting of children). It is Browning who thematizes, narrativizes, and attempts to explain the actions of those involved. None of this is done by the agents themselves.

56. Browning 1992.

57. But see Carr 1986a, pp. 149ff. Carr's curious and totally unargued positing of a "collective consciousness" regarding the explanation of action is one of the stranger facets of his fundamentally implausible views regarding the connection of intention and explanation. However, it is a recognized consequence of the tradition within which Carr writes and has well-known political implications as well. See, for example, David Cooper, "Verstehen, Holism, and Fascism," in O'Hear 1996.

58. See Roth 1996, p. 48 n. 20.

59. Roth 1996; 1987.

60. Rouse 1991, p. 446.

61. See Roth 1987, pp. 21ff.

62. However, when speculation begins regarding which sentences these are, I no longer believe (contrary to Quine) that we can pick out just which sentences played this role and say exactly how they abetted the initial learning process.

63. Rouse 1991, p. 451.

64. Rouse 1991, p. 453.

65. Rouse 1991, p. 449.

66. One worry is whether or not practice-based explanation ultimately leads back to a domain of mental objects. The basis for this worry regarding the notion of practices is best developed in Turner 1994.

67. Rouse 1991, p. 463.

68. Klemperer 1998.

69. I wish to thank Jim Bohman, Brian Fay, Lynn Hankinson Nelson, and Karsten Stueber for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.