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BACK TO THE FUTURE: POSTNARRATIVIST HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY[1]

POSTNARRATIVIST PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY. By Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. ix, 239.

ABSTRACT

Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen has written an important book. It directly confronts a key theoretical dilemma that has shadowed debate in historiography for several decades: histories cannot be written without using some narrative structure or other, but epistemological evaluation cannot be applied to narratives *qua* narrative. Thus, if empirical inquiry takes the form of a history, then it cannot be rationally evaluable, and if rationally evaluable, empirical inquiry cannot be in the form of a history. Kuukkanen's book both directly confronts and proposes a strategy for surmounting this tired and tiresome theoretical barrier. Kuukkanen deserves great credit for attempting to reshape a long-stalled debate in a way that enables the theoretical options to be imagined anew. Yet his structuring of the oppositional tendencies engenders some ongoing problems regarding how to understand the philosophical stakes and options. This review argues that achieving Kuukkanen's postnarrativist future requires going back to past epistemic concerns discarded because they were tied to conceptions of logic and explanation that could not be reconciled with narrative form. Kuukkanen practices postnarrativism but still preaches a prenarrativist conception of logic. To reach his promised future, to actually overcome the dilemma that he rightly seeks to transcend, one must actually have the courage of Kuukkanen's pragmatist convictions.

Keywords: analytic, Arthur Danto, epistemological evaluation, explanation, historiography, Louis Mink, narrative

For reasons about which one can only speculate, analytic philosophers simply ceased taking notice of philosophy of history or historiography somewhere around the mid-1970s. Those otherwise invested in these topics effectively returned the favor, inasmuch as the sort of epistemic issues that were the staple of analytic inquiry—questions regarding the hallmarks by which to judge history *qua* rational form of empirical inquiry—likewise seemingly ceased to trouble those writing about historical theory. This latter group—contemporary theorists of history—instead took their agenda more from narrative theorizing. Indeed, all agreed that historians typically construct narratives. But this very point of consensus regarding narrative as the predominant form of histories effectively ensured that analytically inclined philosophers would remain at loggerheads with all other theorists of history. That group of philosophers continued to find unworkable any

1. I would like to thank Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, Hayden White, and Eugen Zeleňák for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay. The views expressed, however, are my own.

suggestion that narrative form, however inescapable for purposes of writing history, could be disciplined so as to yield any epistemic insights.[2]

In the mid-1980s, Frank Ankersmit voiced a widely shared frustration regarding what he then termed "the dilemma of contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy of history."[3] At its root, the frustration grew from the aforementioned intellectual impasse, the apparently irreconcilable opposition of "*narrativist philosophy of history* versus *epistemological philosophy of history*."[4] Yet Ankersmit uses the term "dilemma" not to name an identified logical problem but only as a rhetorical flourish for the purpose of highlighting how narrativists and epistemologists talk at cross purposes.

But a lurking dilemma can be made explicit: histories cannot be written without using some narrative structure or other, but epistemological evaluation cannot be applied to narratives *qua* narrative. Thus, if empirical inquiry takes the form of a history, then it cannot be rationally evaluable, and if rationally evaluable, empirical inquiry cannot be in the form of a history. The dilemma so formulated ironically echoes Hempel's notorious proposal, since it mandates nothing less than the literal rewriting of histories into some other form so as to allow for epistemic assessment.[5] For this reason—the fact that considerations of narrative form supposedly prove orthogonal to those of rational evaluation—histories seem forever consigned to analytic limbo; they could not be damned for an unavoidable narrativizing, but that very fact debarred any possible scientific redemption.

Ankersmit's 1986 analysis tracks the conventional wisdom by assuming the two traditions "not mutually reducible."[6] In light of this, he counsels capitulation, that is, that those with epistemic concerns simply go narrativist. But the details that would make this "solution" something other than a mere abandonment of recognizably epistemic aspirations remained unarticulated.[7] Indeed, thirty years on from the initial labeling of the dilemma, theorists still find themselves confronted with this unhappy choice between either epistemic standards inapplicable to histories or nonepistemic narrative theorizing. This dilemma remains an unresolved roadblock to charting a role for theory in history.[8]

2. For a relatively recent expression of just this sort of uncomprehending pose, see David Velleman, "Narrative Explanation," *Philosophical Review* 112, no. 1 (2003), 1-25.

3. Frank Ankersmit, "The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History," *History and Theory* 25, no. 4, *Beiheft* 25 (1986), 1-27.

4. *Ibid*., 1.

5. For details, see especially Hempel's remarks concerning histories as offering only "explanation sketches." Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (1942), 42-43. This article has been widely reprinted.

6. Ankersmit, "The Dilemma," 2.

7. Ankersmit's own resolution of the dilemma that emerges involves postulating history as a *sui generis* form of knowledge. As noted below, Kuukkanen finds ample reasons for skepticism about this proposal.

8. For a sense of how historians view the ever more esoteric turns of theory and its ongoing dissociation from historical practice, see, for example, Kerwin Lee Klein, *From History to Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), especially the first two essays in that volume; John H. Zammito, "Post-positivist Realism: Regrounding Representation," in *The Sage Handbook of Historical Theory*, ed. N. Partner and S. Foot (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 401-423, and his "Historians and the Philosophy of Historiography," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*," ed. A. Tucker (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 63-84. In Peter Kosso's entry in that volume, he flatly states: "Narrative explanation suits the situation of historiography, but not science" (Peter Kosso, "Philosophy as Historiography," in Tucker, ed., *A Companion*, 24).

Kuukkanen's book both directly confronts and proposes to surmount this tired and tiresome theoretical barrier. On the one hand, Kuukkanen extends full faith and credit to what he terms the "narrativist insight," a view that he glosses as follows: "History books include integrative views, theses or claims, and all the hundreds of pages and their sentences and statements are designed to explicate and ground those" (1).[9] But this narrativist insight notwithstanding, Kuukkanen also holds that "historiography is a form of rational practice" (2). In this spirit, he identifies his book as a contribution to the "philosophy of historiography," and so an investigation "of the results of inquiries about history, including history writing, the investigation of evidence and other epistemic questions (that may precede writing) as well as the central concepts and other structuring elements of historiographical presentation" (6). Kuukkanen's book tracks this debate along the lines laid down by Ankersmit's delineation of epistemological and narrativist conceptions of history. The book's eleven chapters chart the intellectual terrain so imagined, intending to show by its reconstruction of this divide a way to overcome it.

Kuukkanen deserves great credit for attempting to reshape a long-stalled debate in a way that allows the theoretical options to be imagined anew. And since what loosely comes under the rubric of philosophy of history has an amorphous form, Kuukkanen cannot be faulted for any supposed failure to carve topics at their joints. Yet his structuring of the oppositional tendencies engenders some ongoing problems regarding how to understand the philosophical stakes and options. For example, Kuukkanen not implausibly takes a concern with explanatory patterns as a defining mark of those inclined to analytic philosophy of history. But this particular theoretical algorithm for parceling theorists into his two opposing camps—see chapter 2, "From Analytic Philosophy of History to Narrativism"—lumps together Dray and Hempel, since both "were oriented towards implicit historiographical explanatory patterns" (15). However, this elides Dray's alternative to Hempel's explanatory model and so obscures an important facet of that debate. More generally, this structuring builds into narrativism an anti-explanatory bias. But surely this concedes a point much at issue, namely, whether or how narratives explain.[10]

Regarding the other side of the theoretical divide, Kuukkanen characterizes narrativists as "interested not so much in the generation of historical knowledge

9. Kuukkanen's "narrative insight" echoes Louis Mink's claim that historical theses cannot be "detached" from the books that develop them. See especially Louis O. Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding," in Mink, *Historical Understanding*, ed. B. Fay, E. O. Golob, and R. T. Vann (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 61-88, but esp. 77ff. In an unpublished piece, Mink puts it this way: "*Where scientists can note each other's results, historians must read each other's books*. This is the fact which I want to inscribe in flaming letters, because it is a fact which any theory of historical knowledge must account for." Cited by Richard T. Vann, "Louis Mink's Linguistic Turn," *History and Theory* 26, no. 1 (1987), 2. As Eugen Zeleňák has correctly emphasized to me, one must distinguish between the aforementioned "narrativism" as conceived of and studied by historiographers/philosophers and narratology as conceived of and studied by literary theorists. In particular, although some concerns overlap, narrativism typically has and narratology typically lacks any epistemological concerns.

10. For a recent declaration of disciplinary faith on just this point, see James Cracraft, "History as Philosophy," *History and Theory* 54, no. 1 (2015), 52-53.

and explanation as in the forms in which it is presented" (15). Kuukkanen classifies Arthur Danto and Morton White as "early narrativists" despite the fact that both concern themselves with historical explanation. Indeed, M. White sees historians in the end as offering what Hempel terms "explanation sketches" because they lack a statement of a law that underwrites them. And neither Danto nor White defends narrative *per se* as a form of explanation, even though each sees something interesting and important about its place in the construction of histories. Narrative form for both these thinkers constitutes a problem to be overcome, and not part of any philosophical solution.

Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, Danto actually coined the term "narrative explanation." What makes the coinage something other than an oxymoron by Danto's own lights concerns how that term figures in his justly famous *Gedankenexperiment* regarding the Ideal Chronicle. This connects in turn to the continuing relevance and importance of what Danto terms "narrative sentences" in shaping what counts as the human historical past as an object of explanation.

Kuukkanen glosses the upshot of Danto's famous thought experiment as showing that "because of the narrative form of historical knowledge, historical presentations cannot be made to correspond to the past" (16). But consideration of how Danto actually deploys the term "narrative" in this context and the point he makes about our relation to the past suggests rather different lessons to be learned. This proves to be of some importance since although Danto's insight constitutes a still critical intervention in the debate, his contribution has nothing to do with narrativism in the sense that interests narrative theorists in this field.

Danto formulates narrative sentences so as to demonstrate that all statements true of a time *t* could *not* be known to be true at time *t,* even by a being with perfect apprehension of all that happens as it happens at every given instant in time. For truths about *t* continue to accrue after *t*; for example, (A): "The Thirty Years War began in 1618." Danto famously insists (A) is true *of* 1618 but not knowable as true *then* even by a being with perfect knowledge of all that happens at each moment. Knowledge of this truth has *nothing* to do with some notion of correspondence between statements and states of affairs, since *ex hypothesi* no "facts" are altered regarding any time in question. Danto terms sentences like (A) "narrative" because they relate a later event to an earlier one in a way that indicates a *conceptual/theoretical* connection, specifically one that reveals something known to be true of the earlier time *in light of* a later.[11] Additional truths come to be added just because the passage of time reveals *antecedents* of later happenings latent in earlier ones.

Narrative *sentences* do *not* constitute a *narrative* in any theoretically relevant sense of that term, but typically they imply one. Danto takes such "antecedents revealed in retrospect" as a defining mark of the historical. The *implied* narrative would develop an account of how that later time shapes our understanding

11. Danto borrows G. E. M. Anscombe's celebrated phrase "under a description" to characterize what makes random facts into an event of a certain sort, for example, one described as "the beginning of the Thirty Years War." I term a connection formed by a narrative sentence "conceptual" in order to highlight the point that though "the facts" (however one wishes to understand what those are) may not be of human making, events comprised by them are.

and significance of an earlier, an understanding and significance that that period of time has now but could not be known to have had then. Moreover, narrative *sentences* do not determine the *structure* of an implied connection, but only demarcate an event for later narrative fashioning. Put another way, a narrative sentence functions not unlike a colligatory concept as Kuukkanen himself develops that notion. In this regard, Mink will claim that by its very title, Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* adumbrates a narrative sentence, that is, one that postulates a conceptual connection between earlier and later points, a connection revealing a truth about some earlier time knowable only as a result of later developments.[12]

Danto's use of the term "narrative" consequently invites a confusion between, on the one hand, merely but importantly *conceptually* relating an earlier time to some later one, and, on the other hand, offering an *actual* narrative that develops that relation (and so providing what theorists in this area think of as a narrative). Even more, Danto's still important analysis of temporal language and his coinage of the term "narrative explanation" does *not* signal any interest or basis in his own work for a defense of narrative as itself a legitimate form of historical explanation. Rather, his notion of a narrative sentence makes vivid and compelling a reason why our human relationship to history will always be dynamic and not static, for the passage of time inevitably reveals truths about the significance of past times not knowable at those moments.[13] In short, *Danto contributes importantly and insightfully to an epistemic and not a narrativist understanding of histories*, at least as Kuukkanen chooses to use those terms.

Yet his misclassification of Danto proves prescient seen in terms of Kuukkanen's larger goal. By going back to the epistemic issues involved in Danto's singular use of the term "narrative," Kuukkanen locates a philosophical past that sought to fruitfully conjoin narrativist and epistemological concerns.[14] As we shall see, disentangling these concerns and insights from positivist conceptions of scientific explanation ultimately suggests a possible philosophical model for his proposed postnarrativist future.

In chapters 2 and 3, although Kuukkanen appropriately proposes to treat both Hayden White and Ankersmit as leading narrativist theorists (and certainly each in his own way exemplifies dominant strands in narrativist theory as it has come to be appropriated by those interested in theory in history), he chooses to do this by assimilating them. That is, he assumes that they have similar (or similar enough) notions of narrative that they may be treated together. "I hope to be able to show that despite some differences, they share a certain core philosophy between them" (30). He distills their shared theoretical essence to three theses he labels "*representationalism, constructivism, and holism*" (30). Ankersmit's account then receives the overwhelming share of Kuukkanen's attention in the

12. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in Mink, *Historical Understanding*, 184.

13. Additionally, as Mink later makes explicit in *ibid*., 182-203, Danto's device provides principled reasons for why histories will not aggregate and why histories manifest what Kuukkanen terms the "narrativist insight."

14. I am indebted to conversations with Hayden White for forcing me to clarify Danto's use of the term "narrative" and the relation between Danto's narrative sentences and narrative theory. This does not imply agreement by White with how I have done this.

book's exposition of narrativism, since his identification of a supposed common core shared by Ankersmit and White licenses a focus on Ankersmit's more philosophically developed (if highly questionable) notions of representation and holism.[15]

But this linking of Ankersmit and White proves to be a problematic strategy for criticizing narrativists, since it both proves too little and too much. It proves too little since what White intends by "representation" has no interesting or relevant connection to Ankersmit's use of the term. Ankersmit mires his account as Kuukkanen notes in visual metaphors. In contrast, White characteristically employs the term "narrative" as shorthand for the human ability to encode experience: to convey information and so to create meaning in one sense of that vexed term. Ankersmit wants a theoretical justification for taking historical knowledge as unique. White argues rather that the structures found in histories unavoidably prove to be produced by historians. Nothing in White argues for the epistemic uniqueness of history or for the assimilation of history to aesthetics. For these reasons the disproportionate focus on Ankersmit results in a critique that proves largely irrelevant to one of its intended targets (that is, White). Thus although Kuukkanen develops a number of interesting and insightful criticisms with regard to Ankersmit's theoretical *oeuvre*, what he has to say about narrativist theories of representation in chapter 4 of his book proves irrelevant both to White's own work and more generally to discussions of narrative theory not bound to Ankersmit's theorizing.[16]

Kuukkanen also proves too much by his critique of Ankersmit inasmuch as Kuukkanen explicitly wants to credit what he himself terms the narrativist insight. Yet his critique of Ankersmit leaves no reason for endorsing narrativist theory, for the narrativist insight presupposes a form of holism, yet Kuukkanen claims to reject this view. Thus, he owes a more nuanced and discriminating account of narrativism just here. As Kuukkanen certainly knows, the credibility

15. The thesis that Kuukkanen identifies as holism relies upon a formulation unique to Ankersmit. I do not believe that even Ankersmit still holds this view. Taken as an empirical claim about historical narratives, it clearly is false. Taken as a definition, it is unmotivated. Kuukkanen's digression on Ankersmit has the further unfortunate consequence of making it appear as if holism ought to be rejected because it is a consequence of Ankersmitian narrativism. Yet Kuukkanen actually endorses what I understand holism to be; more on this below. For an alternative approach to how to interpret White regarding representationalism, constructivism, and holism, see my "Hayden White and the Aesthetics of Historiography," *History of the Human Sciences* 5, no. 1 (1992), 17-35.

16. Kuukkanen reads White as endorsing a form of representationalism as that term has come to be used by Ankersmit. Ankersmit very deliberately borrows the term from aesthetics, and wants to suggest that one can model historical representation on the artistic, as if the former offers a type of reproduction of its subject matter. I have argued elsewhere that this view rests on a number of confusions. I do not find in White's work any comparable use of the notion of representation. See, for example, the opening paragraphs of White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," reprinted in White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1-25. In this context, when White criticizes notions of "realist representation," I read him as rejecting forms of historical narrative that invite readers to imagine that "the world speaks itself and speaks itself as a story" (2). White focuses on the social and political implications that a choice of form has for the content, whereas Ankersmit imagines that the form has special epistemological and metaphysical implications. When White speaks of representing reality, a closer analog to what he has in mind would be the sort of discussion of literary conventions found in Erich Auerbach's classic work, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

of the narrativist insight rests much more on White's work than on Ankersmit's distinctly idiosyncratic version of it.

Kuukkanen terms his position "postnarrativist" in order to emphasize (rightly, in my view) a pressing need to reanimate lapsed discussion regarding criteria for rational evaluations of histories. The real merit of Kuukkanen's book manifests itself starting in chapter 5, "Reasoning in History." At this point he stops reconstructing what he takes to be other positions and sets out to expound his own.[17] Kuukkanen premises his account on a postulated distinction between the "*meaning* of a historiographical thesis from the evidence for this *thesis*" (70). Disentangled from confusions about how to construe what holism might or might not be, what Kuukkanen seeks to do with this distinction involves crediting the "narrativist insight" that the whole text constitutes the link the narrative constructs. Indeed, one of Kuukkanen's chosen focal texts, E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, like Huizinga's classic work noted earlier, connotes through its title phrase a narrative sentence. It forges a conceptual connection that marks the significance of what occurred earlier in light of what happened later, one that Thompson's actual narrative tracks and develops.

Kuukkanen's thought in formulating the meaning–evidence distinction can be put as follows. Narrativists correctly maintain that nothing less than the book answers the question of how the English working class comes to be. This one may call the meaning, in a Minkian sense regarding nondetachability. That is, the content of the thesis resists summary—detachment—from how it is developed in the context of Thompson's book. "The meaning of the thesis can be said to be constituted of these kinds of central elements that constitute the process, which results in the birth of the English working class. Understanding meaning implies that one is able to link these elements together" (82). Kuukkanen also insists that

17. I deliberately will ignore in my discussion Kuukkanen's understanding of holism, since he appropriates this from Ankersmit, and so unfortunately injects an utter and unneeded confusion into his account. To give one small sense of just how confused, recall that Quine formulates the holist thesis in opposition to the analytic–synthetic distinction, and so holism stands in opposition to positivist views that single statements, understood in isolation from the language or theory of which they are a part (their "propositional content," as philosophical dogma had it) were the unit of epistemic evaluation. But despite the fact that holism entails the negation of analyticity—a view that statements may have their true value determined not on the basis of fact but by virtue of their meaning, whatever that is thought to be, Kuukkanen chooses to make analyticity (and here he just follows Ankersmit) a defining feature of his account of holism (for example, 47). Ankersmit also assimilates historiographical discussions of semantic holism to works of art. Kuukkanen signals how deeply in the thrall of this notion he has enmeshed himself when he declares, "Rejecting holism means in effect abandoning the suggestion that historiography creates products akin to artistic artefacts" (96). Kuukkanen's own discussion and endorsement of the accounts in Sellars and Brandom (143-147) regarding warranted assertion presuppose and build upon just the sort of holism Kuukkanen earlier imagines himself to reject. All of these "pragmatic" accounts receive their philosophical impetus from a rejection of single statements as the unit of rational evaluation. For those not immersed in the minutiae of the history of analytic philosophy, the point at issue here can be illustrated by considering why Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* had the impact it did. Taking his lead from Quine, Kuhn notes that the accounts of scientific change he rejects presuppose a type of "paradigm-free" evaluation of empirical data, the sort of presupposition canonized by the analytic–synthetic distinction. Kuhn introduces the notion of a paradigm to make vivid the contextual—holist—dependence of how evidence will be interpreted.

the narrativist insight does not imply that all statements in the book count equally when rationally evaluating the book.[18]

The particular statements of fact in the book count as what Kuukkanen calls the evidence for the meaning.

> Ideally all the material in a work of history supports the main thesis (and in this sense the narrativists are correct that the whole literary work matters), but all the details mentioned do not define the meaning of the thesis, that is, what the thesis is. Minute details about minor agents and their actions and movements provide evidentiary support for the thesis but the understanding of the thesis does not require knowing all of them. The case is rather that the more of this kind of information there is, the stronger the evidence for the thesis. The bits and pieces should naturally be appropriately connected to provide effective support. (79)

The tricky term here, one that Kuukkanen invokes repeatedly, is "support." Indeed, labeling certain facts as evidence already implicates them in notions of rational warrant and so logical support. Whatever comes labeled as evidence can only be so if taken to rationally underwrite some thesis or other (otherwise in what sense would the facts in question count as evidence for anything?).

The remaining chapters, 6–10, then undertake the task of outlining Kuukkanen's "postnarrativist" account of how to unpack "support" in terms of criteria for rational evaluation of this meaning–evidence relation. (Chapter 11, the final of the book, provides just a brief coda that recapitulates and summarizes the book's primary themes.)

Chapters 6 and 7 consist of an extended meditation on the place of colligatory concepts in historiography. Kuukkanen pursues two issues with regard to colligation. As observed earlier, he deploys this term in a way reminiscent of Danto's use of "under a description," that is, as a "synthesizing expression in historiography" (98; see also 112), as in "the Christian expansion" or "the thaw in the Cold War" (Kuukkanen's examples). He argues first that, use of the definite article notwithstanding, colligatory terms should not be understood as name-like or a definite description (as in "the present king of France"), and so as having a type of referential function. That is, he ascribes to colligation not an ontological status but a theoretical one. Second, Kuukkanen maintains "colligatory concepts provide an entirely new approach in comparison to traditional theorizing on concepts and kinds in the philosophy of science" (112). But his claims for their "epistemic authority" (113) appear to echo Kuhn's characterization of how paradigms function in normal science.[19] From this perspective, those epistemic virtues

18. Although he elsewhere cites Peter Novick's classic *That Noble Dream* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Kuukkanen misses an important opportunity to illustrate his own thesis by citing Novick's discussion in that book of the then notorious controversy that surrounded the firing of David Abraham and Novick's defense of Abraham's thesis—his "meaning" in Kuukkanen's sense—despite flaws in the evidence adduced for it (Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 612-621).

19. See especially Kuukkanen's remarks at 127 regarding theoretical fruitfulness as an important criterion for underwriting the epistemic authority of colligatory concepts. Consider as well the following: "My conclusions are, first, that colligatory concepts cannot be true of historical reality in the sense of correspondence. Second, they cannot be seen as natural categorizations of historical reality. Third, colligatory expressions do not emerge from the historical record; nor can they be uniquely correct regarding any given historical data. Further, choices between them cannot be determined solely on empirical grounds. . . . Finally, it is nevertheless possible to form judgments between rival

he ascribes to colligation prove indistinguishable from those that philosophers typically ascribe to good scientific theories.

The upshot of these two points is that they enable Kuukkanen to develop an account of what makes for the goodness of colligation that does not require appeal to some notion of truth. By severing colligation from any association with an implied referent, invoking such notions should not be evaluated as if making some statement of fact, and so to be judged true or false. Rather as groupings, their postulation neither adds to nor detracts from whatever facts there happen to be. By extension, Kuukkanen argues that historical texts are *not* themselves true or false since they colligate facts and this colligation entails no correspondence as such to reality. Yet, he wants to insist, colligations remain epistemically evaluable with respect to the support they receive from statements of evidence, and statements of evidence, since they are typically statements of fact, can be true or false. This sets the challenge he must meet to ultimately transcend the dilemma: to explain how evidence provides rational warrant for a narrative in the *absence* of claims that such a warrant licenses true belief.

Following the lead of American pragmatists, and especially neo-Sellarsians such as Robert Brandom, Kuukkanen defends the view that "*The inferential practice of giving reasons is thus itself a form of justification* . . . [and so that] *justification lies in the inferential act of rationality itself* and not, for example, in the copying of prior states of affairs or in referential relations" (146).[20] Put another way, talk of truth becomes consigned to metaphysics (as some positivists would say), since all one humanly has access to is evidence. Justification consists as always in the practice of giving reasons. But conclusions accepted on this basis become regarded as further inference tickets, licenses for adducing further conclusions or for guiding future actions. Chains of inferences do not terminate in truths; pragmatic assessments emphasize other outcomes. Where inference proves unreliable, one revises. But what beliefs to alter remains an open question, because any faulty result can be variously accounted for. This again is a feature of the type of epistemic holism common to Quine, Sellars, and later Wittgenstein.

Yet all this still leaves unredeemed Kuukkanen's promissory note to cash out the sense of the term "support" at work in specifically historiographical argumentation as he conceives of it. Kuukkanen proposes to make good on this promise in chapter 9, "The Tri-partite Theory of Justification of Historiography." "The evaluation of (synthesized) historical knowledge can be divided into three dimensions or sectors with interrelated connections: (1) the epistemic dimension; (2) the rhetorical dimension; and (3) the discursive dimension" (155). Kuukkanen's underlying intuition in making a distinction among the epistemic, the rhetorical, and the discursive seems clear enough. The first should evaluate the thesis in terms of its theoretical virtues; the second should evaluate it in terms of whatever

colligatory expressions on the basis of empirical and extra-empirical rational criteria: exemplification, coherence, comprehensiveness, scope, and originality" (128-129). Although Kuukkanen has published on Kuhn, he overlooks the parallel with Kuhn's discussion of the necessity of paradigms.

20. Kuukkanen is not the first person to utilize Brandom in order to sidestep traditional concerns about truth in history. See, in particular, David L. Marshall, "The Implications of Robert Brandom's Inferentialism for Intellectual History," *History and Theory* 52, no. 1 (2013), 1-31, especially 10.

arguments prove specific to that book, and the third should evaluate the contribution relative to other contributions in that field. The fact that the discussion of one dimension will "bleed over" into another should not count against the analytical separation of three ways to weigh up what a specific text contributes to what passes for knowledge and understanding in a field.

Yet the *prima facie* plausibility of these criteria quickly becomes clouded as one examines just how they might be actually distinguished. The epistemic dimension turns out to be those theoretical values that he attributes to colligation and that philosophers of science ascribe to theories. The rhetorical dimension he characterizes as "a specific form of argumentative persuasion that relies on informal argumentative strategies and reasoning" (157). Here he refers readers back to chapter 5 for details regarding what this "specific form" amounts to, but the gloss he offers there consists of the following: "Historiography is about argumentation in a looser sense than that of a clear set of premises and conclusions" (95). The specifics of these "informal" strategies receive no clarification beyond that.

Whereas the rhetorical dimension putatively concerns features internal to the text, the discursive "amounts to something 'external' because it refers beyond the text itself to the historiographical *argumentative context*" (157). In addition, if the salient feature of the rhetorical or the discursive as he presents them resides in their analogy to persuasive function *qua* speech act (161ff.), it becomes difficult to discern how historical narratives serve such a function by appeals to "informal" reasoning. Without some working account of what makes these quasi-speech acts instances of reasoning and not appeals to noncognitive considerations, it remains unclear how Kuukkanen actually resolves this puzzle.

Moreover, as he goes on to state, "justification in historiography goes beyond the external-internal dichotomy or, alternatively, cuts through it" (166). This in turn he elaborates upon by noting the "qualities of good argumentation are by and large shared by internal and external arguments, but their rational nature does not change the situation that they presuppose a politically loaded and socially shaped argumentative field" (166).

But his account of warrant appeals to a notion of justification. This formulation in turn contains a disjunctive account: "appropriate justification" or "appropriately authoritative." "When our assertion is warranted, we either have appropriate justification for stating it or are in the appropriately authoritative situation to assert it" (143). But when one asks what makes an assertion "appropriate," Kuukkanen cannot as a pragmatist appeal to the gods of logic. As he states, "Asserting is a normative sort of social practice that authorizes certain sorts of inferences and makes the asserter responsible for giving reasons for the assertion" (145). But what underwrites the social practice? "It is, precisely, the successful practice of providing assertorial inferences" (145). But then "appropriately authoritative" comes to no more than the claim to be "rationally justified," and that of course needed explication to begin with.

Appeal here to Sellars or to Brandom does not help. Sellars famously speaks of the space of reasons but has his own idiosyncratic logics for various subject matters that can inhabit that space. Brandom subsequently develops an account of reasoning in a Sellarsian spirit by his bold proposal to turn Frege on his head, that

is, to unpack the notion of material inference not by appeal to some prior notion of logic but instead in terms of social practices. And although this fits well with a performativity-based account such as Kuukkanen's, it makes hash of appeals to some more substantive notion of rationality, since what counts as rational will be decided by what one's interlocutors let pass.

Now I am open to the suggestion that we cannot do better than this. But this leaves one with only a small "r" notion of rationality. Kuukkanen resists embracing precisely such a consequence.[21] He explicitly wants more than small "r" rationality provides. For one, he would like to be able to claim that a "*colligation is epistemically (and more generally cognitively) warranted*" (184). But, as noted, given his pragmatic explication of warrant, a principled line between the three elements of justification—the epistemic, the discursive, and the rhetorical—becomes impossible to draw. Moreover, when Kuukkanen declares "it is *rationality itself* that provides the prospect for community transcendence and the inter-communal validity of historiographical arguments" (192; see also 193; emphasis mine), he simply contradicts that pragmatic characterization of rational inference he earlier provides and endorses.

This generates, I suggest, the following predicament. On the one hand, small "r" rationality blurs any principled distinction such as Kuukkanen sometimes desires among epistemological, rhetorical, and discursive dimensions of historiographical practice and supports no universalistic claims. On the other hand, capital "R" notions of rationality simply do not square on Kuukkanen's own characterization of historiography as "informal" argument, whatever that might be.

(1) "The fundamental principles of rationality, and their persuasiveness, may be seen as universal and shared over different times and locations, however." (194; see also 193)

(2) "In the end, it became clear why the governing concept of the *postnarrativist philosophy of historiography*, rationality, must be community-transcending. The reason is that the historian should aim at producing an argument that becomes as widely rationally persuasive as possible." (197)

(3) "I should clarify that I do not mean that there is a God-given rationality or one with some other kind of supernatural origin with a capital 'R'." (194)

(1) and (2) above simply cannot be squared with (3). But (3) encapsulates the central point stressed by Kuukkanen in chapter 8. Indeed, one might be tempted to ask, if (1) and (2) were already known to be correct, how could the dilemma that Kuukkanen strains to resolve have arisen in the first place?[22]

But these regressive features of his thought must be balanced against Kuukkanen's own best insights.

When I write about the argumentative nature of historiography, the point is not to suggest that historians use formal argumentative strategies and that their main mode of writing

21. Indeed, Kuukkanen's hankering for a more philosophically traditional account of rationality motivates, I suspect, his explicit rejection of what Barry Barnes aptly terms "natural rationality" (195). But, I would argue, he should embrace precisely this view. Barry Barnes, "Natural Rationality: A Neglected Concept in the Social Sciences," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1976), 115-126.

22. For a thoughtful account, see John H. Zammito, *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For a view that embraces a version of small "r" rationality, see my "The Pasts," *History and Theory* 51, no. 3 (2012), 313-339.

resembles explicit arguments of the type made by analytic philosophers. The point is, however, to suggest that they nevertheless advance a central thesis and that such theses are made reasonable through the reasoning displayed in their books which almost invariably contain long descriptive sections. (91)

Read somewhat against his own characterization of what he does, Kuukkanen does point to a way out of the initial dilemma, that is, how to credit the narrativist insight without forsaking concerns regarding rational evaluation of historical inquiry. In the details of his analyses of the historical works he uses as his exemplars—E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* and Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*—Kuukkanen does actually demonstrate how to explicate historiographical practice and so offer substantive guidance regarding how to rationally evaluate works in history.

What attention to such tasks of epistemic evaluation reveals does not involve the laying on of universal canons so as to discipline texts into logical form. Rather, evaluation requires careful and detailed consideration of the types of connections that texts chart and their merits relative to other works in the field. A great deal of work in the philosophy of science and social science lies in a borderland between philosophy, sociology, and history. This will only be taken as a sign of infirmity by those held captive by a picture of philosophical analysis that simply never matches up to disciplinary realities. Works by Nancy Cartwright, John Dupre, Peter Galison, and Ian Hacking, among others, exemplify the type of approach that postnarrativists should seek to adapt and emulate with regard to historiographical issues.

Achieving a postnarrativist future requires going back to past epistemic concerns discarded because they were tied to conceptions of logic and explanation that could not be reconciled with narrative form. Kuukkanen practices postnarrativism but still preaches a prenarrativist conception of logic. To reach his promised future, to actually overcome the dilemma that he rightly seeks to transcend, one must actually have the courage of Kuukkanen's pragmatist convictions. A longing for a universal logical solvent hinders Kuukkanen's ability to fully imagine a future freed from the apparent dilemma of having to choose to be a narrativist or an epistemologist, but where the choice of one precludes the other. Yet by attending to his practice, a different theoretical path opens.

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