

NOTES ON NARRATIVE KNOWING

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Notes on

Polkinghorne, Donald. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany (NY): SUNY Press, 1988.*

Human beings existing on three realms: material, organic and the realm of meaning.

18

“The registering of relationship by the narrative scheme results from its power to configure a sequence of events into a unified happening. Narrative ordering makes individual events comprehensible by identifying the whole to which they contribute”

“In this sense, narrative can retrospectively alter the meaning of events after the final outcome is known.”

“In summary, narrative is a meaning structure that organizes events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole”

19

Plot construction is based on Peirce’s abduction.

Both plot construction and hypothesis development are interactive activities which “show a connection among the events and the resistance of the events to fit the construction.”

“An appropriate configuration emerges only after a moving back and forth or tacking procedure compares proposed plot structures

with the events and then revises the plot structure according to the principle of ‘best fit’.” (Retrospection, hermeneutic circle).

20

“Narrative is always controlled by the concept of time and by the recognition that temporality is the primary dimension of human existence.”

21

“In narrative organization, the symmetry between explanation and prediction, characteristic of logico-mathematical reasoning, is broken. Narrative explanation does not subsume events under laws. Instead, it explains by clarifying the significance of events that have occurred on the basis of the outcome that has followed. In this sense, narrative explanation is retroactive”

22

Narrative explanation “increases the scope of synoptic judgment in our reflection on experience” (Mink, qtd. in Polkinghorne).

27

Merleau-Ponty pro study of language beginning with speech not thoughts (cf. integrationalists).

28 Merleau-Ponty pro structures of lang. deriving from more basic perceptual structures.

29 “For Merleau-Ponty, linguistic structures are themselves generated by historical, contingent acts of speech, which they serve and which they constitute. They have no prior, ultimate existence in reality itself. They are a means for ordering experience and making it meaningful without having to turn meaning into universal laws” (cf. integrationalism).

30

Vs. traditional notion of truth as previous to experience:

“Merleau-Ponty proposed that ‘truth’ is not a natural property of the world in itself but that consciousness discovers truth in contact with the world. Truth is inseparable from the expressive

operation that says it; it does not precede reflection but is the result of it. In short, truth is a creation within speech that presents itself as adequate” (cf. my ‘truth effects’, and symbolic interactionist theory of meaning).

Notion of “wild logos”, raw meaning which calls for expression (cf. the prenarrative, and Hillis Miller’s ethics of reading).

“Expression is a response to a solicitation from below.”

Life is unfinished, it requires interpretation, “This interpretation must be adequate to what is given—it must include the incarnate and temporal dimensions—but it consists ultimately of contributions from both the given and the interpreter” (30).

31

Narrative as discourse. (Configurational dimension of discourse not the same as the configurational dimension of narrative), language organizes life into meaningful wholes.

35

Bruner: paradigmatic vs. narrative rationality (2 types of configuration of sentences into larger units).

36

“either paradigmatic, concerning an extrinsic reference, or narrative, concerning the speaker’s experience of a unity”

“Narrative expresses its work of configuration in linguistic productions, oral and written” (ignora totalmente la narratividad no verbal)

“The narrative scheme serves as a lens through which the apparently independent and disconnected elements of existence are seen as related parts of a whole. At the level of a single life, the autobiographical narrative shows life as unified and whole. In stories about other lives and in histories of social groups, narrative shows the interconnectedness and significance of seemingly random activities. And in the imaginative creation of stories about fictitious characters, either passed on as part of a cultural heritage or as contemporary artistic creations, narrative displays the extensive variety of ways in which life might be drawn together into a unified adventure”

50

Analytic philosophy's examination of the use of cause in history: "Danto's analysis of narrative sentences had three epistemological implications. First, the notion of cause in narrative sentences is paradoxical in that it appears that a subsequent event transforms a prior one into a cause" (50). (e.g. 'in 1717, the author of *Rameau's Nephew* was born'). 2nd, actor unaware: historian organizes. 3rd: explanation does not involve prediction. Danto missed the configuring work of emplotment linking sentences into a story.

51

Gallie emphasized overall story as "The main bond of logical continuity, which makes its elements intelligible" (Gallie qtd in Polkinghorne).

Reader of stories "is concerned about the norms of acceptability that have 'to be gradually recognized and constantly assessed and reassessed as the story proceeds'." (Gallie quoted).

51

Mink emphasizes that story presentations of historians gives impression that their conclusions are inferences from the evidence, "when really they are only indicators of the way the evidence has been ordered" (Polkinghorne on Mink).

Mink: 3 structures of comprehension, theoretical, "categorical" and configurational (Inferences, classifications and narratives).

59

Dray, Gallie and Mink showed that narrative is a mode of comprehension, not just a presentation for a content that might just as well be expressed otherwise: it imposes a type of coherence on its sentences.

"The historical narrative, like other discourses, is composed of two kinds of referents: (1) a first order of referents, which are the events that make up the story, and (2) a second order of referents, the plot."

62

“Thus, historical narratives transform a culture’s collection of past happenings (its first-order referents) by shaping them into a second-order pattern of meaning.”

64

“Whatever protocols of coherence actually exist in the physical world, human existence adheres according to protocols that are literary or narrative in character. These protocols show up in the explanations humans give for their actions and in the interpretations they make of the relations among the events of their lives.”

65

Ricoeur emphasizes link of history writing with elementary forms of storytelling.

66

“Ricoeur comes to narrative from a concern with the phenomenon of double or hidden meaning, which he believes figure in the most important understandings of human existence”

67

“Ricoeur switches the discussion about historical narrative from its legitimacy as an epistemologically sound method to, more generally, what the use of historical narrative reveals about human beings and their relation to the past” “He identifies two basic notions: (1) narrative is related to the world of human action and (2) narrative is a response to the human experience of feelings of discord and fragmentation in regard to time.”

68

Position advocated by Polkinghorne: “that aspects of experience itself are presented originally as they appear in the narration and that narrative form is not simply imposed on preexistent real experience but helps to give them form.” Ricoeur emphasizes more, like Mink, White, and the structuralists, the imposition of form through narrative.

69 On biography and history:

“In literature and history, the narrator has control of the story and decides what to include or exclude. In the life narrative, the self is the narrator of its own story. Unlike authors of fictional narratives, however, the self has to integrate the materials that are at hand. Authors of historical and fictional narratives describe events that have already ended, but the self is in the middle of its story and has to revise the plot constantly without knowing how the story will end.”

“The historian having the advantage of hindsight, may tell a story about what has happened that will be different from the various stories told by the past actors. The historian does not narrate past facts but retells past stories from a current perspective.”

Theories by structuralists, Frye, Scholes and Kellogg, Robert, Hillis Miller, Kermode... ,

78

“Marthe Robert proposed that stories presented in novels were representations of the common human tension between the ideal and the real and that this tension could be understood using psychoanalytic theory.”

79

Kermode: Biblical time not an undifferentiated flow of time, *chronos*, but it rather broken by periods of significance (*kairos*). Ending as resolution and return to a routine. “Narrative plots provide the form in which these periods of human drama can be described.”

82

Ricoeur vs. Barthes’ ‘chronological illusion’, Lévi-Strauss and Propp, narratology is more flexible but “did not move all the way

to Ricoeur's idea of grasping the whole" (*Polkinghorne does not really assess the shortcomings of Todorov, Bremond, etc.—JAGL*)

92

Culler, vs. narrative as simply a construction of discourse.

"Without the notion that the story is about something outside the discourse itself, it would lose its force as a selection from possible events and its power to intrigue us."

93 vs structuralism:

"structural theories have tended to overlook the surface ambiguities of stories and to assign only one structural description to stories that have more than one meaning." Ricoeur says struct. deprive the temporal dimension of its configurational dimension as plot. Ricoeur vs. structuralism; his interest in human experience of time vs. interest in unchanging logical rules below human awareness.

99

Development of reception theory, text no longer simply structure but a communication event.

Narrative and psychology:

106

"Scheibe's thesis is that people undertake adventures in order to construct and maintain satisfactory life stories. One's life story needs to include a series of progressive and regressive periods repeating over time—that is, needs adventures followed by the return to repose".

"Narrative enrichment occurs when one retrospectively revises, selects, and orders past details in such a way as to create a self-narrative that is coherent and satisfying and that will serve as a justification for one's present condition and situation."

Stephen Crites: "One's personal story or personal identity is a recollected self in which the more complete the story that is

formed, the more integrated the self will be. Thus, self-knowledge is an appropriation of the past”

107

Self without a story mere personal pronoun for Crites.

“The creation of a future story that imposes on the tightly woven recollective story and attempts to maintain an unchanged self leads to unhappiness with the future.” Future requires an open and adaptive character.

109

“Research programmes have now moved beyond individual sentences to groups of sentences that are linked together into discourses and conversations, with particular attention to how the grammars for these larger linguistic groups are acquired”

111

Mandler: Narrative and schematic knowing. “Schematic knowing is different from serial knowing because the schematic strategy contains the notion of a whole or theme that pulls together and configures the bits of information into a systemic relationship: a ‘scene’ in the case of spatial schemas, a ‘plot’ in the case of temporal schemas”; “After the whole series of episodes has been presented, the narrative includes ending portions which show that the episodes coalesce into one story.” Experiments on narrativity, ordering segments, etc.

112

“Stein and Policastro have argued that no single structural definition can account for the wide range of compositions people accept as stories. Their research has showed that, although people can readily distinguish good stories from poor ones, they still accept as stories compositions that are deficient in many of the ways required by the proposed structural models.”

113

Basic roots of narrativity in cognition (Mancuso, Fuller).

118

Gergen: communal prod. of stories, people produce stories together.

119

Gergen: “self-narratives depend on the mutual sharing of symbols, socially acceptable performances, and continued negotiation” (qtd. in Polkinghorne 119).

120

Freud and rtp. “In view of the retrospective character of all narrative and the inseparability of the self from its story, the event is a necessary hypothesis for understanding, regardless of whether it is factual or fictional”

121

Culler and the two logics: “the two logics—one which insists on the causal efficacy of origins and the other which treats events as the products of meanings—must exist side by side”

As a result of Freud: “Human beings are not simply constructions based on past events; they are also products of narrative structures.” (Cf. Jerome Blumer’s ‘self-indications’—JAGL).

122-23.

Narrative and organizational consultation

Culture of specific associations, self- representations, identity themes, emergence of more integrative narratives, narr. a necessary form of coherence for an organization’s realm of meaning.

125

“Heidegger has proposed that human experience in its original form is hermeneutically meaningful. Narrative is a primary scheme by means of which hermeneutical meaningfulness is manifested.”

126

Linguistic realm as an activity, a process of meaning creation for existence.

“The temporality of human experience is punctuated not only according to one’s own life (for example, one’s fiftieth birthday) but also according to one’s place within the long-time-spans of history and social evolution (e.g., the 1980s). Narrative is the mode of meaning construction that displays these various experiences of time.”

127

Vs purely chronological notion of time “People simply do not experience time as a succession of instants.”

129

Augustine and complex present infused by past and future too (memory, attention and expectation). “Augustine also introduced two other problems. The first was that time is sometimes experienced as a concordant whole and at other times as splintered and discordant fragments.”

Ricoeur beyond Husserl’s notion: “limited because it has overlooked the privileged access that narrative provides for the way we articulate our experience of time.” (129).

130

Heidegger’s levels of temporal experience, culminating in an awareness of personal finitude

131

Ricoeur and plot. “Plot can be isolated from judgments about the *reference* and content of a story, and to be viewed instead as the *sense* of a narrative” (*Careful here: a sense proposed by the narrative, for Polkinghorne. Not the sense we see ourselves: cf. my papers on friendly vs. unfriendly criticism —JAGL*).

Ricoeur uses Mink:

“The act of the plot is to elicit a pattern from a succession, and it involves a kind of reasoning that tacks back and forth from the events to the ploom until a plot forms that both respects the events and encompasses them in a whole. The ‘humblest’ narrative is always more than a chronological series of events: it is a gathering together of events into a meaningful story” (131).

(To be added: A new type of configuration emerging from the observation of narration, of its recontextualization: a new plot beyond the plot, including the observer or reader - JAGL).

133

“Narrative describes the phenomenon of intervention, in which a character’s power to act is linked to the objective order and its serial time”

Heidegger’s second level of time experience (historicity) also addressed by Ricoeur as we extract from a narrative its theme, point or ‘what it is about’ (*i.e. we reconfigure the narrative as readers; cf. my idea of the 'literary statement' - JAGL*).

“The past is not over, because it can be retrieved in memory. The going back into the past is not a mechanical reproduction of what has been; rather, it is a fetching back of the possibilities that have passed by in order to make them real again in the present”
(A contact point here between Ricoeur and Michael André Bernstein's 'sideshadowing' - JAGL).

134

“Ricoeur holds that narrative calls Heidegger’s primacy of individual existence into question and acts as a corrective to Heidegger’s analysis of experience of time remembered. Says Ricoeur: ‘Narrativity, from the outset, establishes repetition on the plane of being-with-others.’ Narrative opens the experience of history and moves it beyond personal history to create a communal history. Narrative is a communication not just between contemporaries but also between predecessors and successors,

and the common destiny is more fundamental to it than any individual fate. Through the transmission of past possibilities to present hearers, the tradition of a historical community's common destiny is repeated or retrieved. thus, narrative enlarges Heidegger's analysis of the experience of time, and his personal memory is expanded to a communal memory."

Heidegger's 3rd level, "temporality", an analogy with God's position, seeing time as a whole, acceptance of one's place in temporality (*—cf. myths of overall organization and the life of the universe - JAGL*). Ricoeur sees it as insufficiently related to the experience of time. "there may be in narrative analysis the uncovering of a level in which the awareness of death precedes and makes possible the awareness of history and the memory of dead heroes"

135

Ricoeur: "The reasons for which we tell stories are rooted in the same temporal structure that connects our 'élan' towards the future, our attention to the present and our capacity to emphasize and recollect the past" —quoted in Polkinghorne; "Life is lived above the objective plane and its instantaneous 'nows'" (Polkinghorne).

138

Ideal of rational purposeful behaviour as fully human in Weber.

140

Structuralism and rules, unchanging and static, governing human behaviour. Vs. structuralists: "Ultimately, they have failed to bridge the gap between their descriptions of formal structures and actual expressive human activity, in all its variety and 'illogic'."

141

Peter Winch: "that the rules of behavior are socially generated and exist merely as the sedimented and exist merely as the sedimented agreements developed over time within a social

organization” Language game approach, based on Wittgenstein, vs. structuralism:

“In the language game approach, the rules are grounded and maintained by sedimented social agreement”.

141

Alternative to structuralism, language game and purposeful rationality is possible, based on narrative action.

“The concept of human action proposed by a narrative approach is that action is an expression of existence and that its organization manifests the narrative organization of human experience. Acting is like writing a story, and the understanding of action is like arriving at an interpretation of a story.”

143

“the composition of plots draws on the human competence to distinguish the domain of action from the domain of physical movement”

144 (interactive common assumptions of narrator and listener: competence to understand concepts like agent, goal, etc., culturally given meaningfulness and valuation of actions, understanding of human temporality...

145

“Narrative is the form of hermeneutic expression in which human action is understood and made meaningful” (Cf. Aristotle). “*The Poetics*, then, is about the composition of narratives, identified as a hermeneutic activity in which the relationship between parts is made apparent”

149

The concept of the self, disregarded by human sciences because of their formal science model, now reemerges in human disciplines.

150

“It appears that for the major part of daily life a person’s self concept is raised, edited and implemented preconsciously, at the prelinguistic level of emotion and ‘felt’ dispositions.”

“Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be.”

151

“The answer proposed here is that the self is a concept defined as the expressive process of human existence, whose form is narrativity.”

“Self identity becomes linked to a person’s life story, which connects up the actions into an integrating plot.”

152

Personal emplotment has to integrate events which result from accidents, givens, unintended consequences, etc. as well as personal motivation, roles one plays, which may be confused with the development of a personal plots.

153

Alasdair MacIntyre: stories build on the intrinsic narrativity of life development, “cultures do provide specific types of plot for adoption by its members in their configurations of self”.

154 (heroic, tragic tales...)

Nietzsche, self as something becoming, a construction, knows itself indirectly through signs and symbols of self-interpretation: admires style which connects one person’s actions into a whole.

155 “Nietzsche wanted the plot of personal identity to be a creative work of quality and style.” (*Now this is dramatized in postmodern reflexive styles, I would say - JAGL*).

Practice and narrative.

159

Human disciplines “These disciplines do not produce knowledge that leads to the prediction and control of human experience; they produce, instead, knowledge that deepens and enlarges the understanding of human existence.”

160

“Narrative meaning consists of more than the events alone, it consists also of the significance these events have for the narrator in relation to a particular theme”

161

Polkinghorne stresses believability and verisimilitude in human science rather than logical certainty.

162

“Descriptive narrative research ... attends to the collection of narrative schemes that operate for a person or group and to the situations that trigger or draw the particular narratives into interpretive expression.”

165

Mishler: a story is also a self-presentation through which the teller claims a particular kind of self-identity.

167

Vs purely abstractive use of narrative typologies: “Typologies of narrative function in a very weak sense, and are only useful if seen as an inventory of abstractions and concepts.”

168

“The uniqueness of the particular narrative being described by the researcher is as important as the features it has in common with other stories.”

170 (The Challenger catastrophe as an example):

“Narrative explanations are retrospective. They sort out the multitude of events and decisions that are connected to the launch, and they select those which are significant in light of the fatal

conclusion....The story highlights the significance of particular decisions and events and their roles in the final outcome.”

171

“The report is retrodictive rather than predictive, that is, it is a retrospective gathering of events into an account that makes the ending reasonable and believable. it is more than a mere chronicling or listing of the events along a time line: it configures the events in such a way that their parts in the whole story become clear”

172

Max Weber and the “logic of singular causal imputation” as a “what if” procedure: “constructing by imagination a different course of events, and then comparing these consequences with the real course of events” (*cf. the role of science fiction – JAGL*).

173

“Genesis” better than “cause” in narrative to avoid confusion with the sense it has in formal science.

175

“A valid finding in narrative research, however, although it might include conclusions based on formal logic and measurement data, is based on the more general understanding of validity as a well-grounded conclusion.”

176

Truth in narrative research is not a conformity to actuality.
“Narrative research, then, uses the ideal of a scholarly consensus as the test of verisimilitude rather than the test of logical or mathematical validity.”

178

Therapeutic value of narrative in self-help groups.

179

“The point of the analytic work is not to lead the analysis and to create a literal description of or to recover the past. Instead, the past is to be reconstructed in the light of the client’s present awareness” (*and their needs, I should say—JAGL*).

180

“The analyst knows that the person strives for multiple goals and gratifications, and is required to maintain a balance and integration of the various wants and desires”.

“For both Spencer and Eagle, the therapeutic narrative needs to include those factual events that do exist. A personal story that neglects or denies the events in one’s life in order to be more pleasing or coherent—that is, a fictional account of one’s self—is counter to the therapeutic commitment to truth.”

181

“Hillman holds that it was Freud’s development of the psychoanalytic case history that took medical empiricism out of psychotherapy and brought stories into it.”

182

Reconfiguration of existing life stories in therapy. “The reflective awareness of one’s personal narrative provides the realization that past events are not meaningful in themselves but are given significance by the configuration of one’s narrative. This realization can release people from the control of past interpretations they have attached to events and open up the possibility of renewal and freedom for change.” (182-83)

183

“I have argued that human beings exist in three realms—the material realm, the organic realm, and the realm of meaning. The realm of meaning is structured according to linguistic forms, and one of the most important forms for creating meaning in human existence is the narrative.”

—oOo—

(211 n. 35: Polkinghorne vs. Habermas' identification of consensus as truth. "the best" understanding is not necessarily identical with "a true" understanding).

—oOo—