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Since the second half of the 19th century, any analysis of the epistemic status of historiography has started from the observation that the evidentiary and explanatory standards for mathematically expressed theories in modern physics are not easily applied to the evaluation of narratives produced by professional historians. This observation gave rise to a philosophical puzzle that dominates the philosophy of history: does historiography produce knowledge that is on par with scientific knowledge? In his book *The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation*, Paul Roth turns this puzzle upside-down: historiography *is* a science, and therefore the narrative nature of historical theories is an epistemic aspect of scientific inquiry in general. Given this twist, the challenge for Roth is to produce an account of the epistemic function of narratives in historiography that is in congruence with both the practice of historical research and a broader epistemic account of scientific knowledge.

The *locus classicus* for the traditional puzzle in 20th century philosophy of history is Carl Hempel's "The Function of General Laws in History" (1942). In this paper, Hempel explicated a basic aim of scientific theories, viz. to produce general laws covering the phenomena that the theory targets. According to Hempel, then, if historiography wanted to be part of scientific inquiry, it had to aim for the formation of general laws covering historical events. However, since there are few candidates available for general laws in history, most theorists of historiography responded negatively to Hempel's normative theory, and instead focused on the literary and narrative aspects of historiographical writing. This "narrative" shift in the theory of history, mostly associated with the work of Hayden White (1973) and Frank An-

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kersmit (1983), subsequently led to neglecting the question of how historiography could fit in a broadened notion of science. Roth's new book is an attempt to step away from this well-entrenched dynamic of the post-Hempelian debate on historiography.

The starting point for Roth's analysis is a central feature of historical narratives, namely their ability to describe events in terms that were not available at the time of the occurrence of the events. Starting from the work of Arthur Danto (1965), Roth focuses on the "narrative sentences" produced by historians, e.g. "The Thirty Years War began in 1618". These sentences describe an occurrence from the past as part of a larger sequence of events, even though this description could not have been available at the time of occurrence. By structuring the relations between events, historical narratives are an essential condition for describing these events. According to Roth, there is no way to conceptualize the events independently of the narrative sequence which colligates them into a whole. Because historical events can only be described within a narrative structure, Roth defends that historical events have three characteristics that set them apart from the typical events or phenomena captured by theories in the natural sciences (11-15). First, historical events cannot be standardized: their description necessarily remains open for revision in light of new occurrences. Second, historical events are not detachable from the narratives in which they operate. And third, narratives do not aggregate, in the sense that there is no general narrative in which all events from the past fit. Roth's main example throughout the book is Raul Hilberg's narrative of the Holocaust in *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961). According to Roth, the Holocaust as a historical event is the result of Hilberg's detailed narrative of what happened to Jewish people under the Nazi regime. The holocaust as an event to be explained by the historian, on Roth's account, cannot be detached from Hilberg's narrative that explains it. "The narrative and the explanation are of a piece" (17). Narratives not only enable the description of historical events, they also explain them by showing the developmental process of how the events came to be. However, this explanation emerges only *in retrospect* and only in so far as there is some *human interest* to construct them from the available evidence (21). In this regard, Hilberg's narrative constructed the holocaust as an event, and provided an empirically responsible and genuinely novel way to see the past.

Roth's claim that narratives both describe *and* explain the events which are its elements, is by far philosophically the most contentious aspect of the book. In Chapters 2 and 3, Roth takes on the task to defend it. He argues that one cannot conceive a set of past events as elements that exist independently of a story. Any set of historical events necessarily entails a narrative that constitutes that set. Roth's defense hinges on the claim that historical events in well-researched,

respectable historical work cannot be conceived of as stable kinds. There is no general theory of historical events as kinds prior to their function as elements in a historical narrative (67). Here, Roth heavily relies on Ian Hacking's account of intentional kinds from *The Social Construction of What?* (Hacking, 1999). There, Hacking distinguished between indifferent kinds and human action kinds. Whereas the former cover things that are resilient to the way we classify them, the latter are bound solely by community-sanctioned descriptions used to characterize these kinds. As a consequence, human actions are inherently open to redescription under a change of the categories of a community's self-understanding. For Roth, historical events are like human action kinds. One can change historical events themselves by presenting them through an alternative narrative order. This also constitutes the reason why past events are necessarily indeterminate and can only be given in narrative form (44).

Roth's strategy in these chapters might appear question-begging: Roth assumes that historical events cannot be captured by a non-narrative theory, through either some type of laws or some type of causal mechanism. From that assumption, it follows that there are no stable kinds of historical events that can operate independently of a narrative structure. However, Roth never seeks to prove that no general theory of historical events is possible. In later chapters, Roth develops a naturalist strategy to solve this problem. I.e., he aims to stay within the investigative practice of historiography as it is, not as some philosophical view of scientific knowledge would like it to be. The very reason why the philosophy of history in the 20th century has been unsatisfied with any theory of historical explanation is exactly the gap between the standards that such a theory entails and the dominant practice of historical inquiry, where narrative construction plays a central role. Roth's naturalism, discussed in Chapter 7, aims to remove this gap.

Roth's analysis of narrative explanations in Chapters 1 and 4 has some interesting consequences—interesting, because they show how far removed Roth's naturalism is from standard philosophical wisdom. First, Roth collapses the distinction between description and explanation (75). Since the descriptions of historical events cannot be detached from their narratives, the narratives which explain an event also constitute its very description. Ever since Hempel and Oppenheim's "Studies in the Logic of Explanation" (1948), description and explanation have been conceived of as two distinct aims of scientific knowledge. Consequently, for many philosophers of science Roth's position will seem confused: one should be able to assess a historical theory on its descriptive and explanatory adequacy separately. However, on Roth's view this distinction makes no sense when applied to historical narratives. Second, Roth's expansion of the possible explanatory strategies in science entails a form of explanatory pluralism:

there is not one logical form appropriate to explicate all explanations. In order to make this expansion more plausible, Roth discusses the use of narrative explanations in evolutionary biology (76).

In Chapter 4, Roth discusses a crucial worry about his narrativist analysis of historical knowledge, namely that historians are like fiction writers who can make up events as they please. Although the narrativist turn in the theory of history has often highlighted similarities between the construction of historical narratives and fiction writing, Roth's analysis stays far removed from this analogy. On Roth's account, historians do not produce fictions. They are empirical investigators whose narratives are held responsible to the standards of empirical evidence. However, historians are also responsible for the choice of their narratives, and this choice is not uniquely determined by the empirical evidence. Throughout the book, Roth emphasizes that multiple inconsistent narratives can conform to the same set of evidence. The various competing narratives of the Holocaust again serve as his prime example. Any evaluation to decide which narrative is better can only be based on a case-by-case comparison. Roth gives no general rules for evaluating competing narratives, no general theory for explaining the epistemic success or failure of narrative explanations. The evaluation of competing narratives is left in the hands of the historians working on those narratives. Instead of providing a methodological guideline for the historian based on insights from epistemology, Roth's primary aim is the articulation of a view on scientific knowledge that can incorporate narrative explanation.

Perhaps the most original aspect of the book is Roth's analysis of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In Chapters 5 and 6, Roth argues that Kuhn's innovation in the history of science was to provide a narrativist explanation of the progress of scientific knowledge. Roth aims to show that Kuhn's notion of a scientific revolution and its accompanying concept of paradigm can be understood as a narrative explanation, i.e., articulating a sequence of events describing and explaining the transition between two different practices of empirical inquiry. Kuhn's narratives of scientific change show how certain core beliefs in scientific communities are challenged, then disputed and how these disputes are eventually overcome by transitioning to a new paradigm. According to Roth, what science is at any point in time and how it evolves, can best be explained through historical narratives of this kind. This position is consistent with Roth's broader naturalist understanding of scientific knowledge: since narrative explanation is an aspect of scientific inquiry, it can be used to scientifically account for what counts as science. Roth calls this "mutual containment": narrative explanation becomes a part of scientific inquiry *because* it provides our best scientific explanation of what counts as a scientific inquiry.

The Philosophical Structure of Historical Explanation is a rare attempt to breathe new life in a very old discussion. Its naturalist strategy is novel, but also philosophically extremely modest. So modest in fact that most philosophers of science and theorists of history will be disappointed. Roth provides neither theoretical help to the working historian, nor any *theory* of narrative explanations that could be recognized as such by analytic philosophers of science. Roth highlights that narrative explanations share a "coherence-making strategy" with other forms of explanation in science, but he leaves unmentioned most debates on explanation from the philosophy of science. Since Roth's account collapses the explanation-description distinction, it is difficult to assess in what sense Roth's explication of historical explanation compares to any account given by analytic philosophers of science so far. Narratives collate events into an order such that the retrospective significance of earlier events for future events becomes evident. Yet, how narratives can do this is left wide-open to decide by the practicing historians. Roth's explication of narrative explanation falls short of any standards that philosophers of science have traditionally set for a *theory* or an *account* of historical explanation. Indeed, it is an attempt to go beyond the traditional standards set by Hempel and Oppenheim's "Studies in the Logic of Explanation". The book will therefore be a treasure trove for those attempting to look beyond the Hempelian tradition in both the philosophy of science and the theory of history. But it will equally seem like a profoundly unsatisfying account to anyone who wants to stay within the bounds set by that tradition.

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