INTRODUCTION

I shall now give a rough outline of the main argument of the book. In Chapter I a number of preliminary questions are discussed: a logical approach to the narratio is preferred to a psychological one, the narratio is defined and delimited from all other narrative genres by contrasting it with the nearest genre available, i.e. the historical novel.

Chapter II is a *de molir pour mieux bâtir*. The merits and shortcomings of existing investigations of the narratio are enumerated: it is made clear that a different approach will be necessary.

In Chapter III it is claimed that the problem of the narratio is a genuine one: the problems inherent in the narratio cannot be reduced to problems concerning statements. Consequently, the concepts “truth and/or falsity of narrations” can be shown to be meaningless.

In Chapter IV the first steps towards a narrativist philosophy are made. In this Chapter the case of “narrative realism” is defended: in none of the accepted meanings of these terms can the narratio be said to be a “picture” or “image” of the past. This thesis is the first of the three essential pillars that support the narrativist building constructed here. Narrative idealism claims the autonomy of the narratio: the past is described in terms of entities that do not refer to things in, or aspects of the past. The construction and the use of these entities in the narratio are governed by rules that are not mere reflections of regularities existing in the past but which have a standing of their own. Those entities embody what are commonly called “theses on the past” — one should think here of comprehensive, panoramic interpretations of large parts of the past (e.g. the idea that there was an “Industrial Revolution” at the end of the 18th century, or that the 17th century was an age of crisis).

The claim that a narrative historiography is essentially the proposal of some such “thesis on the past” - which will be called a “narrative substance” in this study - is the second pillar under our narrativist building. In Chapter V the concept narrative substance is defended against a number of possible objections. In the course of discussing these objections the nature of these narrative substances is clarified. Chapter VI describes the rather peculiar logical features of narrative substances. It is stressed that Leibniz’s theory of the proposition based upon his so-called “praedicatum inest subjecto”-principle is particularly useful in gaining an insight into narrative logic. It is proved that narrative substances do not refer to (aspects of) the past and that the two ways in which narrative substances can be typified account for the difference between concepts like “the Renaissance” or “the Enlightenment” (which do not have the capacity to refer to reality) and concepts like “this chair” or “this human being” (which do possess this capacity). It becomes clear that all this has its consequences for the concept of self-identity: in one of its uses the word “I” refers to a “narrative substance”. In Chapter
VII it is shown that there is a close resemblance between metaphor and narratio: in both a “point of view” from which we are invited to see reality is proposed. And here we have, lastly, the third pillar under narrativist philosophy. It should be emphasized that these three fundamental theorems of narrativist philosophy are all derived from one simple datum, viz. that narratios consist of constative singular statements on states of affairs in the past.

Two implications of narrativist philosophy as it has been described in Chapters IV to VII are revealed in the last chapter of the book. It is asserted that a set of just singular statements may have explanatory force: neither implicitly nor explicitly is it necessary to resort to general statements for a logically acceptable historical explanation. Furthermore, it is claimed that out of two competing narratios (both containing only true statements on the past) we should always prefer the narratio that takes most risks and is most courageous. There is an obvious parallel with Popper’s idea that one should always look for the scientific theory with the greatest degree of falsifiability, because “the more a statement forbids, the more it says about the world of experience”\(^1\). Curiously enough, current philosophy of history has never shown much interest in the question as to what makes historians prefer one interpretation of the past to another.

On the whole, narrative philosophy is hostile to attempts at turning history into “a social science”, as well as to speculative philosophies of history (both approaches to history will be shown to have striking resemblances) and to hermeneutic theory. The social sciences can learn more from history than history from the social sciences: historiography is a pure culture of many of the methodological troubles that haunt the social sciences. However, narrative philosophy shows a close affinity with historism as advocated by writers such as Ranke, Meinecke or Huizinga (i.e. not with the historicism attacked by Popper in his well-known book\(^2\)) and as practised by contemporary historians like Febvre, Braudel or Trevor-Roper. No one can write history as it is done by 90% of all living historians without being a historist. However, historism as a theory of historical writing has to be emended in some respects.

I expect that the reader accustomed to contemporary analytical philosophy will come to feel some dissatisfaction with the style of this inquiry. In this study the inter-relatedness of a great number of philosophical problems (such as reference, identity, metaphor, explanation and so on) is investigated. One may object that such problems ought to be studied separately. In support of this objection it may be argued that if so

\(^1\) Popper (1): p. 119.

\(^2\) Cf. Popper (2): especially Chapter IV. N.B. in this book the term historicism will always refer exclusively to speculative philosophies of history as developed by e.g. Hegel, Marx, Spengler or Toynbee; whereas the word historism will be used to indicate the ideas on the writing of history put forward by e.g. Humboldt, Ranke, Huizinga or Meinecke and whose intellectual origins in 18th century thought have been explored by Meinecke in his F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, Munchen 1965 (1st ed. 1936).
many different philosophical phenomena are subsumed under one common denominator, my analysis can hardly be honest or unbiased: motives quite alien to the problem investigated will cause me to prefer one specific solution. The detail will be violated by the system. Consequently, I may even be accused of trying to revive the kind of system-mongering that so disfigured the face of German Idealist philosophy. Admittedly, there is a clear difference between most of contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy — which is so strongly problem-orientated and always attempts to solve philosophical problems by isolating them as much as possible from others — and the more synthetical approach followed here.

I should like to make the following two remarks in my defence: one about the nature of the present inquiry, the other about the nature of philosophical investigation in general. Firstly, the narratio is like a machine that can only function thanks to its constituent parts: therefore, it may be expected that narrativist philosophy is essentially an investigation of these constituent parts and their inter-relatedness. Secondly, current analytical philosophy of language seems to be inspired by a kind of empiricism that is in many respects similar to the empiricism which was advocated in the 17th and 18th centuries in connection with the sciences. In those days it was believed that the sciences ought to strive for no more and no less than the collection of a great number of disconnected truths on nature. Bacon is of course a fine example. Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* is the most outstanding specimen of what an analogous approach to the philosophy of language leads to: although some general views lurk behind these unpretentious and disconnected paragraphs such views are only seldom explicitly formulated because of Wittgenstein’s belief that the *point de depart* for a genuine philosophical discussion lies elsewhere. He regards philosophy as an instrument that may help us whenever and wherever language exceeds its proper bounds. And just as there is no medicine to cure all diseases, general views cannot be conceived of within such a conception of philosophy.

Whatever the attractions of this empiricism *in philosophico* may be, it is not beyond all reasonable doubt. Most of the reliable scientific knowledge we possess and its astonishing growth in the past two hundred years, are the result of the scientists’ attempts to discover something general in those very diverse phenomena of reality. So, why shouldn’t we follow the same course in philosophy? If the abandonment of a pure empiricism has proved to be a necessary condition not only for the tremendous development of science since the days of Newton but also for a correct understanding of this development, why, then, should philosophers have to be content with an a-theoretical analysis of disconnected linguistic phenomena? Could a “synthetical philosophy of language” not have at least some advantages over an “analytical philosophy of language” - to take this label seriously for once? I hope this book may suggest a positive answer to this last question.

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