Narrative logic. A semantic analysis of the historian's language
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CHAPTER V
NARRATIVE SUBJECTS AND NARRATIVE SUBSTANCES

While the preceding chapter was a relatively relaxed journey through a philosophical flat-land, we now see the first mountain ridges of narrative logic dimly silhouetted against the sky. In this chapter and the next, our journey will be long and arduous, but at the end we shall have left behind us a number of the most important mountain passes of narrative logic. We may hope to avoid the mists of inapplicable concepts as well as the ravines of narrative realism.

(1) Narrative subjects and narrative substances. Every narratio has one or more subjects. Misleading though this statement may be in some respects we may accept it for the moment. If we take a reductionist, or narrative realist view of the narratio (both positions being intrinsically related, as we saw in chapter IV) we have little difficulty in determining the subjects of a narratio. In an uncomplicated example of a narratio — such as a biography of Napoleon — the individual statements of the biographical narratio that assert something about Napoleon, refer to the historical Napoleon, the human being of flesh and blood who lived from 1769 to 1821 and became Emperor of the French. Thus, from the narrative realist point of view it seems reasonable to say that the (narrative) subject of the narratio is formed by those proper names (e.g. “Napoleon”, “Bonaparte”) or those identifying descriptions that refer to this historical Napoleon. However, from the point of view of the narratio or of narrative idealism, the individual statements of the narratio should be thought of as each contributing something to the “image” or “picture” of Napoleon’s life and times that his biographer wants to present to his public. From this perspective each individual statement on Napoleon when taken as a whole is, in a sense, a property of such an “image” of Napoleon and this “picture” or “image” could, therefore, also be said to be the “subject of the narratio”. (We saw in Chapter IV that these terms “image” or “picture” of (part of) the past may easily give rise to misleading associations, but at present we have no alternatives; indeed, the main concern of this section will be to provide ourselves with better terminology). If we read the written text, as the narrative realist does, as a conjunction of statements (on Napoleon) we discover only statements on past reality. From that point of view narratios appear to consist of statements referring to human beings who lived in the past, or - in non-biographical historiography - to all those things or states of affairs that make up the upholstery of past reality. But from the point of view of the narrative idealist, who takes the narratio as a consistent and meaningful whole, everything asserted in the narratio is seen as a contribution to the “image” or “picture” of the past which the historian wants to present
to us.

I would now like to consider a somewhat more interesting example than a biography of Napoleon. There are two ways in which terms like “conservatism” or “nationalism” can be used; firstly, the terms may refer to actual political opinions held by actual people in the past or in the present (this is their narrative realist use). Secondly, they may denote technical historiographical concepts used to organize our knowledge of the past without referring to the past or describing it (and this corresponds to the narrative idealist view of the narratio). In the latter case, the content of such political opinions is placed, so to speak, within quotation marks. In this respect our “images” or “pictures” of the past differ even from Weber’s “Idealtypes”: although nothing in actual historical reality may correspond with such an “Ideal-type” when taken in its totality, each separate part corresponds with something in the past. “Idealtypes” are compilations of descriptions of (parts of) the actual past. But even parts of these “images” of “pictures” of the past neither refer to the past nor describe it, because they are merely instruments for organizing or giving form to our knowledge of the past. Lastly, “Idealtypes” denote a set of socio-cultural features common to a specific range of historical phenomena, whereas “images” of “pictures” of the past attempt to connect that which shows no apparent similarities. “Idealtypes” are formalist and analytical, “images” or “pictures” of the past are holist and synthetical.

But to return to our example: the fact that not only philosophers of history but sometimes working historians also get these two uses of terms like “conservatism” confused, proves how imperative it is that the distinction should be made. Indeed, much theorizing in history and in the social sciences is vitiated by the tendency to confuse, for instance, (components of) political opinions themselves with the historiographical or narrativist concepts used for representing them. The fact that in both contexts the same name is used, explains the frequency of the confusion.

Furthermore, I must stress the immense importance of these “images” or “pictures” of the past in narrative historiography. It is no exaggeration to say that the purpose of nearly all historical writing, the only exception being some pieces of historical “research” (cf. Chapter I, section 1), is to create such “images” of “pictures”. In this connection I would like to refer to a perspicacious lecture by the medievalist Southern in which he describes how he succeeded as a young boy in mastering a piece of unmanageable historical material. “It was in October 1927; I was

1. There is, for example, a very frustrating sort of intellectual history which, when attempting to give a historical account of a historical phenomenon P, restricts itself to an enumeration of all that is known by the name P, instead of interpreting the historical phenomenon in question. A good specimen of this kind of historiography is the otherwise quite informative P. Viereck, Conservatism, New York 1956. A number of authors who happen to have the reputation of being conservatives are discussed without any attempt to indicate what should be seen as “conservatism”.

fifteen. Like many thousands of young every year I was facing the depressing prospect of writing an essay on King Henry VII. Acres of fact of intolerable dreariness stretched out in all directions, numbing the senses. Then suddenly, out of nowhere the precious words formed themselves. I can see them yet. They were: Henry VII was the first King of England who was a business man. Wrong, of course; or right only in a peculiar sense. But no words can now express the illumination then brought by them. Thus young Southern found an “image”, “picture” or, as one often says, a “thesis” on the past which allowed him to make sense of an otherwise intractable part of the past. I am sure that many other historians have had similar experiences. Anyone who has tried to write history, be it only an essay or an article, must admit that without such “pictures” or “images” the narrative writing of history is virtually impossible: they are the guiding principle in the construction of the narratio as well as its content or cognitive core. Without them the narratio disintegrates into an incoherent set of sentences. Of course not only historians use or construct such “images” or “pictures”. A most effective use has been made of them in sociology, psychology and political theory as well. To mention one example, in the course of the 15th and 16th centuries, political society in Europe underwent profound changes which in many people caused a sense of disorientation. As a consequence the need was felt for a new conceptual instrument that would render political reality intelligible again. Eventually this was found in the concept of the national sovereign “state” and the interpretation of this concept as proposed by Bodin soon proved to be the most fruitful. The elaboration of this concept in 17th and 18th century political theory — of this new “image” or “picture” of social reality which was eventually to lead to the establishment of liberal parliamentary rule — was possible only after the notion of the national, sovereign “state” had been conceived of.

Sometimes such “images” or “pictures” of the past even get names of their own. For instance, terms like “Renaissance”, “Enlightenment”, “early modern Europe capitalism” or the “decline of the Church” are in fact names given to the “images” or “pictures” of the past proposed by historians attempting to come to grips with the past: the connotations given to these terms always embody specific historiographical interpretations of the past. (I hasten to add that it would be more accurate to speak of “Renaissances”, “Enlightenment?”, “early modern Europe capitalisms”, and so on because there are as many of them as we have historiographical narratives on these subjects.) This does not mean, of course, that “images” or “pictures” of the past are not proposed when such generally accepted terms are not in use.

In recent philosophy of history the peculiar character of concepts like “the Renaissance”, “the Enlightenment”, “early modern Europe capitalism” of the “decline of the Church” has already been recognized,

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2. Southern; p. 771.
particularly in the writings of W.H. Walsh. Walsh baptized these kinds of concepts “colligatory concepts” a term introduced by the 19th-century logician Whewell. According to Walsh, these “colligatory concepts” permit the historian to bring a large range of different phenomena under a common denominator. He compares them to Hegel’s “das konkrete Universele”: in both cases we are dealing with concepts that discern a unity (the concept itself) in diversity (the different phenomena “colligated” by the concept)\(^3\). Thus, the “colligatory concept” “the Renaissance” refers to such disparate phenomena as a certain style in painting, sculpture or warfare, a particular philosophy on man’s destiny in this world, a particular conception of politics and of what an educated man should know. All these different aspects of European society between 1450 and 1600 the colligatory concept “the Renaissance” attempts to colligate within one consistent overall interpretation of the culture of that period. In the words of Cebik, when using colligatory concepts “to the [historical] facts the mind adds something not perceived [!]; a limited number of basic ideas or concepts”\(^4\), “and it is the task of these concepts rather to “illumine the facts” than “to fit the facts””\(^5\). It seems, then, that Walsh’s term “colligatory concept” is best suited to replace the terms “image” or “picture” of the past. Both terms refer to “theses” on, or “interpretations” of the historical past that function 1) as a guide to the historian in constructing his narratio and 2) as the embodiment of the content or cognitive core of historical narrations. In fact, this book might be looked upon as an attempt to elaborate Walsh’s notion of the “colligatory concept”.

However, I have opted for an alternative and propose the term “narrative substance” (to be abbreviated as: “Ns”, plural “Nss”). Since this may seem an odd and antiquated term I shall explain why I propose it. First, the use of the term “colligatory concept” is slightly inconvenient. It suggests that certain phenomena in, or aspects, of the past itself should be colligated, i.e. that colligatory concepts (like “the Renaissance” etc.) should refer to historical reality. My point is, however, that such concepts do not refer to things in or aspects of, the past (in Chapter VI this unconventional thesis will be amplified), but exclusively to narrative interpretations of the past. The term “narrative substance” is much less suggestive of a reference to historical reality and is therefore preferable. This brings us to a more fundamental consideration. One should never forget that these “images” or “pictures” — narrative substances as we shall call them — are things, not concepts. Narrative substances are sets of statements and share with things such as dogs or tables the property of being able to be spoken about in statements without ever being parts of those statements themselves (only the name of a Ns, e.g. “the Renaissance of Hans Baron”, can be part of a statement on a Ns).

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3. Walsh (3); pp. 59-63.
4. Cebik (1); p. 41.
5. Walsh (2); p. 79.
Similarly, we can speak about this table, but the table in question could never be part of a statement on it. We can therefore assert of these historiographical narrative substances what Aristotle wrote about substance: “substance in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse”\(^6\). As will become clear in the course of this study, Leibniz’s use of the concept of substance or monad is most easily adaptable to the narrativist philosophy advocated here\(^7\) and that is why I have proposed the term “narrative substance”. Nss are the primary logical entities in historiographical accounts of the past. And they are “simple” like Leibniz’s monads; the statements they contain are not their constituent parts but their properties. To say that its statements are the parts of a Ns is committing a category-mistake inspired by the narrative realist view, according to which Nss are mere conjunctions of statements. Nevertheless, in so far as Walsh has elaborated his notion “colligatory concept”, I completely agree with his views.

Let us summarize and re-formulate our introductory remarks. The second fundamental thesis of this book is that the statements in a narratio do not have a single but a double function: 1) as statements they refer to (things in or aspects of) the past (according to the narrative realist interpretation of the narratio), 2) (in addition to the first function) as the components of a narratio they are the properties of an “image” or “picture” of the past, i.e. of a “narrative substance” (in conformity with the narrative idealist interpretation of the narratio). Sometimes specific names are associated with these “images”, “pictures” or “narrative substances”, but most often this is not the case (from now on I will rarely, if ever, use the terms “picture” or “image” of the past so as to avoid the enticements of narrative realism). As distinct from Nss we find also “narrative subjects”, the subjects we encounter when we consider the narratio — as is recommended by the narrative realists — as a mere conjunction of statements, i.e. the subject(s) of the narratio’s statements. Narrative subjects, then are the subjects known from traditional theories on the nature of propositions.

Viewed in this light, the difference between narrative realism and narrative idealism can be re-stated as follows: according to narrative realism the narratio has narrative subjects only, whereas narrative idealism recognizes two kinds of subjects in the narratio (narrative subjects and Nss). Thus the quarrel between narrative realism and narrative idealism concerns the presence of Nss in the narratio. Reformulated in terms of philosophical logic, narrative idealism claims the presence in the narratio of, firstly, the ordinary subjects and predicates contained in simple statements on states of affairs in the past, next, of


\(^7\) The theorems no. 1 to 9, 11, 12, 18, 38, 47, 51, 57, 58, 61 of his *Monadology* can be transposed to narrative logic. See Leibniz (2); pp. 643 ff.
the subjects and predicates of statements like “N₁ contains p” (= “N₁ is P”), or “N, contains q” (= “N₁ is Q”) that express the narrative meaning of the statements of the narratio. The narrative meaning of “p” is always expressed by statements on Nss like “N₁ contains p” or “N₁ is P”. In these latter statements “N, “ is the proper name of, and refers to a Ns; “p” and “q” are statements describing states of affairs in the past, “P” and “Q” denote the property of containing p or q. The distinction between “P” or “Q” and “p” or “q” should be made because that which is contained in a thing is not a property of that thing. “Containing p or q” is a property of N₁ and “being P or Q” is an attribute of N₁. However, as the distinction between properties and attributes of Nss is of no consequence for my argument, I shall avoid needless prolixity by writing from now on “N₁ is p” instead of “N, contains p” or “N₁ is P”.

Neither in the philosophy of history nor in the philosophy of language has anyone ever seriously defended the idea that the statements of a narratio have a double function (their first function being to assert “p”, where “p” is a statement on a historic state of affairs, and their second function being to assert that “N₁ is p”, where “N₁” is the name of the Ns proposed in the narratio that contains, amongst other statements p). This disregard of the narrative idealist meaning of the statements of a narratio may be due to the cogency and a priori plausibility of the narrative realist, or reductionist view. According to this view, language is supposed to be a mirror of reality: so what other kinds of subjects could there possibly be than those that refer to things in (historical) reality? Another probable reason is the contingent fact that historians always use the same words both for their narrative subjects and their Nss, e.g. “Napoleon” or “conservatism”.

What then, does the narratio look like when we bear all this in mind? The narratio is a complex structure consisting of different parts. Each narratio has a component devoted to “historical research” (cf. Chapter I, section (1)); furthermore, some space is usually reserved for a discussion with other historians. Often, still other preoccupations guide the historian’s writing: he may hope to use the past in order to give recommendations for action now, or, and this happens surprisingly often, he may formulate his opinions on the method to be applied by the student of the topic in question. Purely scientific or theoretical considerations
may enter his narrative — he may explain why a particular scientific theory used for his historical research is better suited to the subject-matter than is another. And certainly every narratio will contain a large number of quite peculiar statements, such as “England went down-hill in the period after the second World War” or “liberal-conservatism was the best answer to the threat of totalitarianism in the first half of the 20th century”, whose correct analysis will and can only be given in Chapter VI, section (3). But besides these and other elements not mentioned here, the narratio contains above all a number of statements that a) can be taken to refer — as statements — to past reality and b) when seen narratively, are used by historians to indicate their view of the past to their readers. The kind of historiography with which we are concerned determines whether component a) or component b) comes more to the fore. Component a) will be more conspicuous in a piece of historical research on the price of grain in the years before the French Revolution than in a narratio on how in the same period the idea that the human being is essentially a representative of the human race was gradually replaced by the belief that the human being is a universe in itself.

It may sometimes be hard to establish exactly what Ns, that is to say, what interpretation of the past is embodied in component b) of the narratio: it may be impossible to indicate precisely only those statements which constitute the Ns proposed in the narratio. Firstly, even the statements used to constitute a fairly well-known (kind of) Ns (such as “the Renaissance” or “the Enlightenment”) hardly ever mention explicitly the proper name of the Ns proposed in the narratio. When Skinner expounds his Ns on Renaissance political thought, he seldom uses such statements as “Renaissance political thought was such and such”; what he does write about is e.g. “the rhetorical defence of liberty”, “the concept of virtus” or “Humanism and “reason of state””. Yet, although the term “Renaissance political thought” is not often mentioned in statements on these topics, Skinner may be said to have constituted a Ns on Renaissance political thought. Thus, Nss cannot be defined by simply collecting those statements in which the name of the Ns in question occurs.

Secondly, Nss are elusive and nebulous in character. Complete agreement as to what exactly is the Ns proposed by a certain historian in his narratio may be hard to attain. If there are many narratios or if there is a long historiographical tradition on a particular topic it is perhaps relatively easy to ascertain what the Nss of the narratios are like. But if only one narratio on a particular topic is available it may be so hard to determine its Ns that we may feel inclined to resort to narrative realism and see the narratio as a “projection” or a narrative copy of its

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8. Q. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*, Cambridge 1978. One of the central ideas in this book is the unconventional thesis that the modern conception of the state was originally developed by anti-monarchial Calvinist theorists in the 16th century. This honour is usually given to the enemies of this tradition.
subject-matter. Only when we can compare a narratio with other narratios the specific traits of the Nss proposed in them begin to show up (cf. pp. 240 ff.). In this respect the identification of a Ns is like learning a new word; in order to understand the meaning of the word “automobile”, it is necessary that we should be shown the similarities and differences between automobiles and other kinds of vehicles. Therefore, narrative idealism and the notion of “narrative substance” become far more plausible when we can compare historiographical topics studied and discussed by generations of historians.

Although it may occasionally be hard to ascertain the exact nature of particular Nss, this is no argument against my proposal to postulate their presence in narratios. An analogy may be helpful: if we do not know the exact distance between the sun and the Andromeda-galaxy it is not due to an unclarity in the notion of “distance”. A similar situation obtains here. It need not always be easy to identify the logical constituents of a piece of language (such as “subject”, “predicate” or “narrative substance”). Our tendency to cling to a grammatical approach to language even when we practise philosophical logic may mislead us: it is “the grammatical fallacy” that forces us to search for fixed (sets of) words or (parts of) statements that correspond to the distinction made between several logical entities. Consequently, what the exact nature of the Ns proposed in a particular narratio is, is a problem for the historian but not for the philosopher of history. A philosopher may criticize the notion of “distance” but he is not supposed to do the astronomer’s work.

I now intend to proceed as follows. I will discuss a number of objections to my proposal to postulate “narrative substances”. The numerous complicated problems surrounding the notion of (narrative) subjects have been thoroughly investigated by many philosophers since Frege and Russell. As far as I can see, one’s position in the debate on these problems has little or no bearing upon the issue of the Nss that will concern us here: consequently I will not go into these matters in my account.

(2) First objection. When Molière ridicules Aristotelian medical science in his Le Malade Imaginaire he has the candidate for a medical degree declare:

"Mini a docto Doctore
Domandatur causam et rationem quare
Opium facit dormire
A quoi respondeo
Quia es in eo
Virtus dormitiva
Cuius est natura
Sensus assoupire" 9

It might be argued that my procedure was essentially the same. I asked what makes narratios what they are, and I answered by producing the

notion of “narrative substances”. But unless independent evidence for the existence of these Nss is adduced, this remains a suspect, circular explanation of obscurum per obscurius. If opium produces sleepiness we must analyze it and show how it acts on the human body. Similarly, one might object, we are not interested in these Nss for their own sake but only in the mechanism at work in the narratio due to which they can play such an important role.

In the remaining part of this book I will attempt to prove that Nss do indeed play an all-important rôle in narrative historiography, so I have no intention of basing my case on the mere postulation of some “virtus narrativa” in order to explain narrative historiography. But there is an assumption underlying this first objection which demands closer scrutiny. This is the assumption that apart from the narratio itself and the Nss proposed in it, there should be a third thing or a third level that does all the work. Similarly, the effect of certain alkaloids present in opium on the respiratory centre in the medulla oblongata is responsible for nearly all the effect produced by opium. It is important to point out that such a suggestion is misleading. The function of Nss in the narratio is not to introduce the reader to some deeper linguistic level where the real “narrative” work is being done. The Ns proposed in a narratio is not a guide or direction as to how to read this narratio (so as to reach that ultimate level). Likewise, paintings are not complicated devices invented by the painter to enable us to reconstruct the aesthetic ideas the painter had in mind (and which form the essence of the painting) but, rather, they are the embodiment of these ideas themselves. Here I would like to remind the reader of what was said in Chapter I on psychologism. Being aware of what Ns is proposed in a narratio is tantamount to understanding a narratio as a narratio and not merely a phase preliminary to understanding it.

Therefore, my attempt to explain the function of Nss in narratios must not be interpreted as an attempt to identify the deeper level suggested by the objection under discussion. I am not trying to unearth the hidden and deep-lying arguments that buttress all narrative accounts of the past. When a philosopher of science gives his reasons in support of the opinion that certain scientific theories or explanations should be accepted by all rational people, these reasons are not, or need not be, part of the arguments used by scientists in order to establish those scientific theories or explanations. Similarly, the arguments adduced here to demonstrate the indispensable function of Nss are not generalizations of a specific kind of hidden argument occurring in actual narratios.

(3) Second objection. It might be observed that making the distinction between “narrative substances” and “narrative subjects” — in order to legalize the notion “narrative substance” — amounts to dramatizing an entirely unexciting triviality. This could be argued as follows. Take a physical object O with the properties denoted by the attributes “a1”, “a2”, … “an”. We can imagine two sets of statements S1 and S2; in S1 the attributes “a1”, … “ai” are predicated of O and in
S₂ the attributes “aₙ” ... “aₙ” are predicated to O. Likewise — this counter arguments says — we are allowed to speak of the “narrative substance” as embodied in S₁, and the “narrative substance” as embodied in S₂, but that would only be a roundabout way of saying that one set of statements differs from another. What both sets contain and where they differ can be made clear by speaking exclusively of statements. Therefore there is no reason to confer on these sets of statements (“narrative substances”) a status over and above the status of individual statements. Whatever can be said in terms of Nss can also be said in terms of individual statements. Thus, to demand for these sets of statements, or “narrative substances” a logical status of their own is to multiply logical entities “praeter necessitatem”. If there are two biographies of Napoleon containing different statements on Napoleon’s life (supposing both sets to be true) we should express the difference(s) between the two biographies in terms of statements and not as one or more differences in “narrative substances” — if, at least, such “narrative substances”, are assumed to be something more than mere conjunctions of statements.

Of course we can see the narratio as a mere conjunction of statements. This is the narrative realist, or reductionist view; but we can equally well prefer the narrative idealist view. Admittedly, it can be pointed out that the notion of the Nss is at variance with the presuppositions of narrative realism, but to show the redundancy of the notion of the Ns, recourse to these presuppositions is inevitable. This may be explained as follows. The narrative idealist can argue that differences in statements are only the marks (though very reliable marks) of another difference (i.e. in “narrative substances”). In the same way we can say that certain clearly visible marks are evidence that A has scarlet fever, while B is healthy: but that does not permit us to conclude that the difference between A and B as far as their health is concerned consists only in external marks. So, if two Nss prove to be unquestionably different with regard to statements, it does not follow that the difference between the two Nss consists exclusively in their containing different statements. But, of course this little argument does not prove that the narrative idealist rightly upholds the notion of the Ns, for, like the narrative realist, he bases his case upon his own presuppositions. So this skirmish has to remain undecided: it was only a prelude to the battle of presuppositions involved. Fortunately, we have already fought that battle in Chapter IV and have seen that narrative idealism wins the day. Assuming, then, the truth of narrative idealism, we get the following picture. According to narrative idealism, there are certain rules (to be formulated in Chapters VI to VIII) that govern the narratio. So if we have two different narratios on a particular topic, we not only have two different sets of statements but also differences in the way in which the rules of narrative logic have been applied. It is, in principle, conceivable that there are differences of the latter kind even when differences of the former kind (in statements) are not (yet) manifest.
There is another somewhat more conventional argument against the
reductionist objection. As soon as we take the stand that differences
between narratios are only differences between sets of individual
statements (and the latter are not seen as merely the marks of the
former differences) it becomes impossible to understand the object of
historical discussion. If historian H₁ uses the statements S₁ ... Sₙ to
classify a certain aspect A of the past and historian H₂ uses the
statements Sᵣ ... Sₚ for a similar purpose, whereas all the statements are
true, the reductionist is probably inclined to think that there is in fact
no controversy at all between the two historians.¹⁰ When X says that this
table is made of wood and Y says that it has four legs, we have no
controversy. But to all appearances historians do have controversies in
such cases; they apparently wish to indicate that S₁ ... Sₙ is more
enlightening for a knowledge of A than Sᵣ ... Sₚ of vice versa. But this
involves us in a discussion on the relative merits of each complete set of
statements and such a discussion cannot possibly be settled by merely
pointing out actual differences in the composition of the two narratios
(“H₁’s narratio contains Sₜ” ; “but H₂’s narratio contains Sᵦ”). For the
reductionist, the only differences existing between narratios are
differences between the statements that have been used to characterize
the past. But those differences are only indications of differences in
historical judgment and not these differences in historical judgment
themselves. For if they were what could be the purpose of a discussion?
What can be wrong with writing down true statements (let us suppose
them to be true)? Therefore, if we were to be satisfied with the
reductionist’s view, we would, by eliminating the notion of the Ns, at the
same time be eliminating the indispensable logical instrument for
understanding the sense and purpose of historiographical discussion. If
we believe that historical discussions are real discussions and not merely
meaningless sham fights on arbitrary selections of true statements on the
past, we need the notion of the Ns.

Although philosophical logic should be rigorous in its use of
arguments, it must be pliable and pragmatic in its recognition of philosop-
hical problems: it would be narrow-minded to play down or even to
ignore philosophical problems because they seem to threaten accepted
certainties. To stick unconditionally to the traditional analysis of language
with its strong tendency to look at language exclusively from the point
of view of statements, is a misplaced sort of rigour. If the actual use of
language shows an obviously different picture — as may be the case,
when we study history and historical discussion philosophically - we must
not simply refuse to accept what it unambiguously suggests: the necessity
of postulating a new logical entity enabling us to discuss the philosophical
problems caused by the narrative use of language. But, of course, the
logical notions urged upon us by the narrative use of language should be

¹⁰ E.g. A.I. Melden, Objectivity, a "noble dream"?, in R.H. Nash, Ideas of history,
examined critically and uncompromisingly.

(4) Third objection. It is admitted that sets of statements can constitute a “narrative substance” and that such “narrative substances” are referred to by means of terms such as “Renaissance”, “the Cold War” or “the rise of modern capitalism” and so on. Moreover, it is agreed that historians often use such terms and even that the linguistic entities these terms refer to have to be recognized in historio-graphical discourse. But, a critic could continue, there is no fundamental difference between these “narrative substances” and the theoretical concepts we know from the exact sciences. Both kinds of concepts have the task of organizing our experience: theoretical concepts organize our experience of physical reality whereas “narrative substances” do something similar for our experience of historical reality, at least as it has reached us through documentary sources. Let us consider, for instance, the term “the Renaissance”; we should take this term as a kind of shorthand for an admittedly mysterious and elusive complex of things in the past. Similarly, theoretical concepts establish a certain relation between the properties of things in physical reality (for instance, impetus is the product of mass and velocity). Thus, our imaginary critic concludes, “narrative substances” and theoretical concepts are essentially the same. Although I am convinced that every philosopher of history or of science will dismiss our of hand an identification of “narrative substances” with theoretical concepts it may be illuminating to enumerate the differences.

To claim that collections of statements (that is: narrative substances) should have something in common with theoretical concepts is obviously odd: most of the latter (such as, for instance, “angular momentum” or “resistance”) are products, quotients etc., of other theoretical concepts. Obviously, narrative substances can never be characterized in this way. Moreover, narrative substances are always related to quite specific historical situations: there is only one period in history we associate with the term “the Renaissance” or with “the Enlightenment”. The theoretical and practical value of theoretical concepts, on the other hand, lies in their applicability to an indefinite number of historical situations. In other words, as regards what has been or will be realized in our actual word, theoretical concepts appear to possess a kind of indifference that is entirely absent in the case of narrative substances. In physics, history amounts to no more than the value of one or more variables in a formula and as such it has no effect at all on the structure of the formula and the meaning of the theoretical concept(s) defined by the formula. On the other hand, what could be the meaning of the term “the Renaissance” be if there had not been an actual past like the one which we usually associate with this term? Lastly, in a previous section we found that Nss are things, not concepts.

There is still another problem if one should wish to assimilate narrative substances to theoretical concepts. Nagel discerns three elements in scientific theories: (1) an abstract calculus, (2) a set of correspondence rules which define the relation between the theory and empirical
observations, and (3) an interpretation or model of the calculus (which in some scientific theories may be absent). That it is well-nigh impossible to indicate the counterparts of these three elements in the narratio, seriously undermines the attempt to assimilate narrative substances to theoretical concepts. But let us say that the narratio as a whole is analogous to the calculus, and that the narrative substances it contains (a narratio may, of course, contain more than one narrative substance) are analogous to the theoretical concepts of the theory. Next we could say that the meanings of the statements of the narratio are a passable analogue of the correspondence rules. However, I don’t know what narrative analogue could be found for Nagel’s third element. Theoretical terms are always either implicitly or explicitly defined by the abstract calculus (e.g. “\( F = ma \)”). But it would be nonsense to say that narrative substances should define each other in the narratio. It would be preposterous to assert that in a history of 18th century political thought the narrative substance on Montesquieu should be defined and could be replaced by a combination of the narrative substances on Locke, Hume or Rousseau, and vice versa.

We will now consider a third and last argument against the view that narrative substances and theoretical concepts should be fundamentally the same. I would like to suggest what I believe to be a very enlightening simile. Narrative substances can be compared to the lenses of a pair of binoculars. Such lenses have been ground with the utmost accuracy so that they give us a view of a landscape as clear and undisturbed by refraction as possible. In the same way, historians continually propose new Nss relating to particular topics in order to achieve an account of the past as clear and consistent as possible. This suggests an important insight into the nature of Nss. The picture or view of a landscape that we can see through binoculars is either vague or clear; yet in both cases the picture has come into being in accordance with the relevant optical laws. These optical laws are, so to speak, the “projection rules” or “translation rules” (in the sense meant in Chapter IV) which govern the projection of the original landscape into a picture (in most cases) at reading distance from the eyes. If we get an unclear picture we do not blame this on the laws of optics. Neither do we conclude that the landscape itself is unclear, for the landscape itself is neither clear nor unclear. This state of affairs has a notable parallel in the narratio. Like the landscape the past reveals itself to the historian without any reticence down to its most insignificant details (of course, as far as the documents allow); nonetheless, the past itself is neither clear nor unclear in the way this can be said of narratios on the past. Obviously, our simile has made us repeat here the narrative idealist thesis according to which the past itself has no narrative pattern or structure. Only pictures of reality, and not reality itself, can be either clear or unclear. If, then, the binoculars show a fuzzy picture of the landscape, no optical law had been defied.

11. Nagel; Chapter 5, section (II).
This analogy sheds a lot of light on the nature of (narrative) historiography. In the preceding chapter we found that many (speculative) philosophies of history suggest the existence of translation or projection rules enabling the historian to translate the past into its linguistic, historiographical, representation. We saw that socio-scientific theories are the most likely candidates for furnishing these translation rules. If historians describe the past exclusively in terms of such concepts as “national product” or “average income” - as may be the case in modern economic, so-called “Cliometric” historiography - historical reality can be said to be projected onto the linguistic level by means of the translation rules embodied in the relevant socio-scientific theories. The protagonists of these forms of historiography argue that only the application of socio-scientific theories can guarantee “objective”, “value-free”, “undistorted” representations of the past. In Chapter IV we have seen what narrative realist assumptions lie behind this sort of argument. Furthermore, if we accept Quine’s views on ontological commitments, we may conclude that the (theoretical) concepts used in socio-scientific representations of the past all refer to “things” in historical reality.

But even if the social sciences had realized — in Toulmin’s terminology — their “explanatory ideal” and become an entirely reliable instrument for the representation of social and historical reality, they still could not possibly be the sole instrument for giving a clear picture of the past, science being only an ingredient - and not an indispensable one - of the narratio. In the same way, its having come into existence in conformity with the relevant optical laws is not a sufficient condition for a view of a landscape through binoculars to be clear. To examine the notion of narrative clarity we must take into consideration the Nss proposed in the narratio: the capacity of the binocular lenses to produce a clear view of a landscape is analogous to the capacity of the Nss to render a clear representation of the past. Conformity with optical laws or with socio-scientific translation rules does not automatically produce clarity either in the case of the binoculars or in that of the narratio. The objection might made at this stage that knowledge of optical laws is necessary for the construction of good binoculars: similarly clarity in the narratio can only be attained on the basis of sufficient social-scientific knowledge. My answer to this is that no amount of optical knowledge alone can ever be sufficient to know how to construct useful binoculars, for we must also know how the human eye synthesizes an image out of the signals that enter it. Criteria of clarity depend above all on

12. Such claims were frequently made during the fifties and sixties of this century. See, for instance, L. Benson, Towards the scientific study of history, Philadelphia 1972. A very uncompromising Dutch appeal to change history into a social science is K. Bertels, Geschiedenis tussen struktuur en evenement, Amsterdam 1973. The enthusiasm for the social sciences seems to have subsided somewhat in recent years.

13. See Chapter I, section (4).
characteristics of the human eye. Similarly, criteria of narrative clarity depend on the distinctive characteristics of our narrative grasp of the historical world. Socio-scientific translation rules alone cannot explain the nature of this narrative grasp. In the 17th and 18th centuries scientists succeeded by trial and error in constructing usable optical instruments. Often they did not possess sufficient knowledge of optics to explain why a particular optical instrument turned out to be satisfactory. Such knowledge is indeed superfluous for testing the utility of an optical instrument. Similarly, socio-scientific translation rules do not enable us to explain the origin and nature of criteria for narrative clarity. Only a narrativist philosophy examining the logical characteristics of narrative knowledge (our “narrative eye”) can do so. I think we may conclude that knowledge of socio-scientific translation rules is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for an analysis of narrative clarity i.e. of how narrative logic governs our narrative accounts of the past.

All this suggests an important difference between theoretical concepts and Nss. Theoretical concepts do indeed refer to, or denote, certain “things”, or aspects of “things” which exist in empirically observable reality even when “no overt procedures for applying those terms to experimentally identifiable instances of the terms” are present; Nss however, do not refer to identifiable “things”, or aspects of them in historical reality. They have a purely “expository” function; they are linguistic devices, auxiliary constructions by means of which historians try to convey a maximally clear and consistent representation of the past.

Theoretical concepts correlate things with words even though those things owe their very “existence” to the words we use to refer to them; Nss function only at the level of words. As we shall see, their sole function is to tie the individual statements of a narratio together. The rules that govern their use cannot be found by analyzing the socio-historical world, but only by investigating the logical structure of the narratio. I think that the analogy with the binoculars shows more forcefully than any of the foregoing arguments the differences between Nss and theoretical concepts. To sum up, all attempts to eliminate the notion of Nss by equating it with the notion of theoretical concepts have to be rejected. Narrative knowledge must be distinguished from scientific knowledge and this distinction runs parallel to that between narrative idealism and narrative realism. The most elementary constituents of narrative knowledge are statements and those of scientific knowledge parts of statements.

With regard to my comparing Nss to the lenses of binoculars, it has to be pointed out where the comparison breaks down. The lenses of a pair of binoculars themselves and the picture seen through them should, of course, be distinguished. This has no analogy in the narratio, for the means employed by a historian to convey a “picture” of the past (for once, I am using this unsatisfactory term), i.e., the Nss which he

proposes to that effect, are his “picture” of the past. On several occasions I have been attacking the view that Nss should give access to something lying “behind” them; in historiography “pictures” of the past and the means by which they are produced are one and the same, i.e. Nss, whereas the comparison of the narratio with a pair of binoculars seems to imply that they are not.

(5) Fourth objection. The fourth and last objection to my proposal to recognize Nss in historical narratios is the most telling and it brings us to the heart of the matter. We have seen (cf. p. 100) that Nss are things, not concepts, although, being linguistic things, they are things of a rather peculiar kind. This implies that the concept “narrative substance” is a sortal concept. Sortal concepts are concepts denoting specific categories of things, e.g. books, chairs, dogs and so on. Sortal concepts can only be introduced meaningfully into ordinary or theoretical discourse if they somehow specify how the individual things indicated by them can be identified. For if they were not to do this any number of the properties of the things $c_1$, $c_2$, ... indicated by the sortal concept $C$ could be ascribed to each individual $c$. In that case there would no longer be any individual $c$’s, but only a certain “something” within which all the $c$’s have lost their individuality. At most the $c$’s could be said to have obtained a “negative” individuality: instead of acquiring extra properties (which ordinarily enables us to identify otherwise unidentifiable things) they precisely have to lose properties (in order to become identifiable $c$’s). In order to avoid such absurdities it will be requisite for the meaning of a sortal concept to contain a specification of how the individual instances of the things denoted by the sortal concept can be identified. A sortal concept unable to give such specifications has to be regarded as meaningless, or, at least, as essentially incomplete.

According to the fourth objection, the difficulty with the Nss is that the attempt to identify Nss under the sortal concept “narrative substance” is bound to be abortive. And as no other comparable sortal concept has been proposed as yet (nor will it ever be) to denote Nss, there is no reason to believe that there should be such things as Nss. Why, then, is it impossible to identify Nss under the sortal concept that I have proposed? In general we identify things by mentioning one or more so-called “identifying facts” about them. For instance, the individual human being generally known under the name of “Voltaire” can be identified by the identifying fact that this individual human being was the (only) author of the literary work known as the Essai sur les Moeurs. As has been stressed by Strawson\textsuperscript{15}, it is not necessary that both speaker and listener should know the same individuating fact; if a speaker thinks (when using the proper name “Voltaire”) that Voltaire was the (only) author of La Raison par Alphabet, while the listener does not know this fact about Voltaire but knows Voltaire to be the (only) author of the Essai, then the particular individual, referred to by the proper name “Voltaire”, has

\textsuperscript{15.} Strawson (1); p. 20-1.
nevertheless been successfully introduced into speech.

However, so the present objection runs, in the case of Ns
identification by means of identifying facts is impossible because every
set of statements that might appear to identify a particular Ns can be part
of an infinity of other Nss. The things historian $H_1$ mentions in order to
categorize a certain historical phenomenon can be part of the Ns
proposed by historian $H_2$ on the same or a related topic. The difference
here with the identification of, for instance, material things, is telling:
mentioning that such a material thing actually was at place $p$ at time $t$ is
sufficient to pick it out from all material things existing in this universe
from the “Big Bang” to Eternity and to distinguish it from all other
things the universe did or might contain besides it. But we should
realize that every time we mention a (set of) statement(s) which, we
think, succeeds in distinguishing a particular Ns from all other Nss, a
different Ns can be conceived of which contains at least this same (set of)
statement(s). A very obvious countermove would be this suggestion:
could we not identify Ns just by pointing out that a certain Ns is the Ns
proposed by historian $H$ in his book entitled “x” and published in the
year $y$? Unfortunately, this will not do. Suppose we have the same
identification troubles with the instances of the dubious sortal concept
“idea”. It might be argued, then, that we are racking our brains for
nothing, for surely we can say that this is the idea $A$ has in mind at $t$.
However, this locution is illegitimate as long as we do not know that the
sortal concept “idea” is meaningful - and that is the question that is
still sub judice here. A solution along these lines is, therefore, only
begging the question. Only if we know that some sortal concept is
legitimate can we identify its individual instances in the way suggested,
but as long as we cannot be sure of that, we cannot legitimize the sortal
concept by arguing that its instances can be identified in such a
manner. Lastly, could we not simply study $H$’s book entitled “x” and
published in the year $y$ and ascertain what the Ns proposed in it is?
Unfortunately this will not do either. We cannot legitimize the sortal
concept “idea” by simply saying: “Just look into A’s mind. You can
ascertain whether a certain idea does or does not exist there. Therefore,
it is possible to identify ideas and, thus, the sortal concept “idea” is
legitimate”. Once more, this would be begging the question. (It should
be noted that the topic of this discussion is not the existence of certain
kinds of things like Ns or ideas, but the meaningfulness of specific sortal
concepts.)

Apparantly, it can be objected that the sortal concept “narrative
substance” does not satisfactorily introduce specific kinds of things into
language. It fails to denote a category of individual and mutually different
things. If we are feeling kindly disposed, we could at the most give the
concept “narrative substance” the credit of likening it to what Strawson
has called “feature-universals” or “feature-concepts” and which are
ordinarily referred to as “mass-terms”. “Snow”, “water”, “coal” and “gold”
are the examples Strawson mentions of these feature-universals or feature-
concepts. Their task is to characterize “general kinds of stuff, not properties of characteristics of particulars; though being made of snow or being made of gold are characteristics of particulars”\(^{16}\). Consequently, these feature-concepts, feature-universals or mass-terms are a kind of forerunner of the more complete sortal concepts. But historians do not content themselves with just turning out something indefinite, to be called “historiography” like the water company supplies water: historians produce specific interpretations of the past. Therefore Strawson’s feature-concepts or mass-terms cannot satisfy us here. We really do need the more complete sortal concepts. We have seen, however, that the sortal concept “narrative substance” does not yield the kind of individual things a sortal concept is expected to denote. So this sortal concept has to be rejected.

It is perfectly true, as this fourth objection suggests, that we cannot identify Nss by enumerating a number of identifying facts about them. However, that does not leave us entirely empty-handed. For we can - and this is my answer to the fourth objection - identify Nss by a complete enumeration of all the statements that they contain and this actually is what happens in each intelligible narratio. According to the narrativist interpretation of the narratio, all its relevant statements \(p, q, r\) etc. should be read as statements on a Ns (“\(N_1\) is \(p\)”, “\(N_1\) is \(q\)”, “\(N_1\) is \(r\)” and in this way a Ns (\(N_1\)) is individuated. Therefore Nss should be seen as a particular kind of thing that can only be identified or recognized as such by a complete enumeration of all their properties and that is where they differ from the ordinary things we know from daily life. The objects we become acquainted with in daily life can be identified, i.e. can be introduced into speech as individuals or particulars by means of a few identifying descriptions because only a tiny fraction of what could possibly be said on them is sufficient to distinguish them from all other things in the universe.

Here we face probably one of the most fundamental metaphysical features of our universe. Studying our use of language we should be aware of the fact - for this determines to a high degree our use of language — that we live in a world whose objects are widely different. Very crude means of identification such as space and time are very often sufficient to distinguish individuals. But we can quite easily conceive of universes where this is not the case. I said that the fact that our universe contains things that widely differ from one another is a fundamental metaphysical feature of our universe (which, for that matter, strongly influences the logical structure of the language we use to speak about this universe). Strictly speaking, however, this is not a speculative truth. We can state this truth with certainty: there is only one method of obtaining reliable metaphysical truths about our universe, viz. by comparing our own universe to other possible universes that differ from ours in their most fundamental constitution. When we make such

\(^{16}\) Strawson (1); p. 202.
comparisons some metaphysical, albeit non-speculative, truths about our universe are brought to light. For a sound understanding of the nature of Nss it will be helpful if we play this game for a moment.

We can conceive of a world in which even less is required for successful identification than in ours. Imagine for instance, a world consisting of one room that can contain only one object at a time. In such a universe, time would be a sufficient (and necessary) means for identification. It would be superfluous to specify the place of the object. Next, we may imagine a world without change. Here spatial criteria would satisfactorily identify the object; we can even allow a certain amount of change to the things in this world as long as they keep their original place. If we were like trees ourselves such a world would not seem too curious to us. In these two imaginary worlds identification would be even easier than in our own universe - where we can usually identify things in less than no time. I shall now give an example of a universe in which identification is more difficult than it happens to be in our own. This will deepen our insight into the nature of Nss.

Let us imagine that in the next century journeys to an inhabited planet circling round Sinus will be possible. In spite of our advanced age by then we decide to make the journey to see the extraordinary civilization of the Sirians. Unfortunately, all the Sirians look very much alike to us, and we can’t really tell them apart. Leaving our hotel on Sirius we are suddenly accosted by a Sirian whom, apparently, we have met before. But during our stay on Sirius we have already spoken to lots of Sirians and because they all look so very much alike we really can’t tell who the Sirian now standing before us is. Since all Earthians have these identification problems, the Sirian government assigns guides to visitors from Earth. Of course these guides have no difficulties in identifying their fellow-citizens. So our guide says: “Don’t you remember? This is the Sirian you met at the party of the ambassador of Earth”. Suppose furthermore that the Sirians are an extremely sociable people and with a chaotic life-style; one really can meet them anywhere and at any time. Consequently, at the ambassador’s party — and on other occasions - we did not meet just this Sirian but also a large number of his fellow-citizens. In that case our guide’s remark will be of little use to us: we met so many Sirians at the ambassador’s party. “Well”, our guide continues, “you did not only meet this Sirian at the ambassador’s party, but also at the reception of the Sirian minister for Foreign Affairs.” However, we met quite a few Sirians on both occasions. So our guide has to call to mind a third occasion (the dinner given by the Commissioner for Interstellar Travel) and so on. The more the Sirians resemble each other and the more of them we meet on each occasion, the longer our guide’s list of occasions required for identification will have to be.

I underline the curious character of the process of identification followed here. Identification does not depend upon recognizing the Sirian accosting us in the street as the Sirian who drank a Sirian
Martini at the ambassador’s party. All the Sirians are fond of Sirian Martinis. Therefore, in the present example there is no simple identifying description that can serve as an anchor to which a long set of other descriptions can be fastened. This is quite unlike the ordinary situation in our world: when we give some identifying descriptions (e.g. “the author of Waverley”) everybody can mention a number of other facts about the man we apparently have in mind — and identification has taken place. In the Sirian world, it is just the other way round; there it is precisely the list of “other fact” that enables us to identify the Sirians. The list of (commonly) known characteristics of a specific Sirian, to which we get access by means of identifying descriptions, is in the Sirian world the exclusive basis for identification. The visitor to Sirius has to cover Sirius’ social reality, i.e. its inhabitants, with a network of the histories of its inhabitants, if he wants to have any chance of success in identifying them. In our world individuals give access to their histories, on Sirius histories give access to individuals.

And this is what identification will always be like in universes consisting of things that very closely resemble each other. Although our own world is not like that — at least not in some important respects — we must be aware of the fact that universes can be conceived of where things are different. Surely, in such universes “historicity” logically precedes “individuality”, whereas in our world a particular thing’s being an individual thing seems to be a prerequisite for its having a history. But, as we shall see, this is only part of the truth for even our own universe. The fundamental fact is that the universe containing Nss resembles that of the Sirians: the number of Nss that can be constructed around a topic is infinite and they may come extremely close to another. In such a universe, identification differs essentially from what we are accustomed to and it requires nothing less than the complete enumeration of all the descriptions (i.e. statements) that could be given of a certain individual thing in that universe (i.e. the Ns). We shall find that Leibniz’s philosophy is admirably suited to deal with universes consisting of such individual things.

The state of affairs I have just sketched can best be represented by the following model. We have to postulate a narrative universe containing all the Nss that are possible on all conceivable historiographical topics. What a historian does when he writes a book or an article is to individuate one (or more, if the subject-matter is more complicated) of those “already-existing” Nss. This fictitious narrativist universe containing all pre-existing Nss is particularly useful to us, because it brings out the fact that no logical difference should be discernable between a) what the historian decided to say on the past when he writes his study and b) what the reader learns about the past when he reads what has been written. When we leave out the fiction of a narrativist universe it may easily be thought that the difference between the historian and his reader should be analogous to that between the contractor who has built a house and the man who is
supposed to live in it. The contractor might just as well have built a
different house, whereas the owner looks upon it as something given. Of
course reading a book and writing it are different things which require
different abilities. But from a logical point of view reading and writing
are exactly alike: in both cases a particular Ns is individuated; and this
individuation process can take the form of a) writing out this Ns, or of
b) reading what has been written out. If this fiction is accepted, we can
speak in the remainder of this book simply of narratios and Nss, instead of
always distinguishing between writing and reading narratios. In
accordance with this suggestion we can state that the descriptions of
Nss (e.g. “N₁ is p”) entailed by the narratio’s statements (e.g. “p”),
are referentially and not attributively used. Lastly, I propose a
terminological distinction in accordance with the ideas developed in this
section: when something can be designated by means of identifying
descriptions we are concerned with the identification of things; when
something can only be indicated unambiguously by means of a complete
enumeration of all its properties (or attributes) - as is the case with
Nss - I’ll use the term individuation.

Thus, we are allowed to say that in the narratio the individuation of
Nss and their being created or constructed in the narratio are — from the
point of view of philosophical logic — one and the same process. When
we are dealing with ordinary things the counterparts of these two
processes are entirely different: on the one hand, we find the creation of
things in reality - whether they come into being by natural or by
artificial means; on the other hand, we have the process of their being
successfully identified when they are introduced by their proper names or
identifying descriptions into our speech about reality. However, when we
are concerned with Nss both these procedures are identical.

We can now formulate a final answer to the fourth objection to the
notion of Nss. Anyone who has read a narratio cannot be seriously in
doubt — as far as logic is concerned — as to which particular Ns has been
introduced into the narratio (in practice, difficulties may arise: I would
like to refer to what has been said at the end of section (1) of this
Chapter). The narratio provides all the necessary evidence for us to know
which Ns has been proposed. When the reader is in doubt we can only
recommend that he re-read the text. There is nothing outside the
narratio itself that can serve as a clue to the individuation of the
particular Ns proposed in it; although extra-textual elements may be
helpful in obtaining a correct interpretation, that is: in establishing the
exact meaning of (parts of) the text (what could a historian living and
writing at a certain time mean when he uses a certain (string of) word(s)?
But care should be taken to keep social, psychological or historical
considerations out of an analysis of narrative logic. Our tendency to look
beyond the narratio itself is, in fact, the source of the mistake inherent
in the fourth objection. For the criticism that it should be impossible to

17. Donnellan (2); p. 102 ff.
see how Nss can be introduced successfully into narratios suggests that this problem should be thought of as analogous to the problem of how ordinary individual things, existing in extra-linguistic reality, are introduced into speech. Indeed, in the latter case it seems inconceivable that something could be introduced into speech as a particular which has no existence of its own, i.e. independent of the process required for its identification.

However, with regard to Nss we cannot claim the existence of a reality independent of the narratios where they occur, as we may find things like trees and tables in reality: even if we adopt the idea of the narrativist universe as a useful fiction, we should keep in mind that the Nss existing in this universe and the Nss as they are introduced into narratios are in all respects (logically and ontologically) identical. However, proper names and identifying descriptions that serve to introduce into speech things existing in reality do differ (logically and ontologically) from these things themselves. To use a theological term, we can say that the narrativist universe and the linguistic means we have to introduce the objects it contains (i.e. statements on Nss) are “co-essential” in a way normal things and the linguistic instruments used to refer to them can never be. Thus, when we ask how Nss can be introduced as particular into speech we must not think of some “extra” world (like objective reality) containing certain “x”s, or particular objects, which, when introduced into speech, should yield our Nss. Such a way of thinking would make us, once more, victims of narrative realist illusions. As we know, narrative realism always searches for things outside the narratio and the Nss that correspond to the logical ingredients of the narratio (i.e. its Nss). However, Nss belong to that curious kind of thing which “as a thing” is identical with its linguistic manifestations. The process of its constitution as an individual things is identical with the individuation of its “complete notion”, to use a Leibnizian term.

(6) Accounting for change: narrative substances as subjects of change. In the preceding section we considered the problem as to whether each Ns possesses an individuality permitting us to introduce the sortal concept of Nss. It is interesting to note that this problem has an exact analogue in the philosophy of historism developed since the days of Herder and Ranke. The difficulty historists had to face could be put, roughly, in the following way: should we attribute to historical entities such as states and nations or cultural traditions an individuality that persists through time and change, or, can we attribute an individuality to such entities only in each particular phase of their development? Whereas we have studied the problem of the individuality of Nss, historists were worried about the individuality of historical entities such as nations or cultural traditions. While in the preceding section we studied the individuality of a specific kind of linguistic entity, historism ran into difficulties concerning the individuality of things that were thought to be part of historical reality. An exploration of the historist’s and the
positivist’s view of the individuality of things may shed some light on the function of Nss in narrative language. To be more specific: when investigating the individuality of (historical) things the purpose of our investigation will be to find a definition of the “subject of change” of a thing, i.e. the entity (either logical or non-logical) required to make the description of historical change possible. I cannot go further into this notion of “subject of change” at the present moment, as this discussion in fact concerns the question of how this entity has to be defined. It will in any case be shown that a satisfactory explanation of how change is described requires the postulation of Nss.

Both historism and positivism reject the attitude which the human being is initially inclined to adopt vis à vis socio-historical reality, that is, the essentialist conviction that all socio-historical objects such as states, nations or institutions possess a persisting essence and that all historical change in these objects is nothing but a modification of these everlasting essences. For instance, in the Middle Ages an essentialist conviction with regard to change prevented people from abandoning the notion of the Roman Empire long after the Roman Empire had ceased to exist. The Frankish Empire and, later on, the Holy Roman Empire were supposed to be the more recent modifications of the same essence already present in the Roman Empire (the medieval adaptation of the doctrine of “translatio Imperii”\(^\text{18}\)). The natural law philosophies of the 17th and 18th centuries can be regarded as the last and most versatile and sophisticated version of this essentialism. Natural law philosophy claimed to give insight into the eternal essence of socio-historical objects such as the state, the citizen and the juridical relations that ought to exist and (by the nature of these things) in fact did exist between these socio-historical objects. Here the “ought” could be deduced from the “is” by assuming an essentialist view of socio-historical reality that did not allow for “essential” change; the essences that have been will always be with us, now and in the future.

In the second half of the 18th century, early historists like Möser and Herder broke with the essentialist conception of historical reality. They were the first to realize (with the possible exception of some 16th century authors)\(^\text{19}\) that in the historical process all things are in a


\(^{19}\) That 16th century historiography already showed historist tendencies has been argued by Kelley; the most remarkable oeuvre of La Popelinière lends extra
permanent flux which touches not only the surface, the contingent, modicational aspects of historical reality, but also what essentailists thought to be the essence of socio-historical things. The essences of, and in, historical reality are as much subject to change as that which seems to lie on its surface. However, this deeper insight into historical change put the historists in an unpleasant and ambiguous position. They argued as follows: if everything in history is subject to permanent change, we should, indeed, see everything in the light of its history. To understand the nature or the essence of a socio-historical things such as a state or an institution, requires knowledge of its historical evolution. The nature of a thing is its history. Consequently — and now we are dealing with the most widely accepted interpretation of the term “historism” — historism claimed that knowledge of socio-historical things coincides with a knowledge of their history.

So far, so good. But the historist’s argument implies that in each phase of its development a socio-historical thing is different from what it was, or will be during other phases of its evolution. This leads to a conclusion diametrically opposed to the historist thesis that the nature of a socio-historical thing should be embedded in its history. The more we stress the idea that in each of its phases a thing differs from what it is or was in other phases, the less plausible it becomes to consider it as the same individual thing in all its phases. This inconsistency inherent in historism manifested itself from the start because historists tended to emphasize the discrepancies between the different stages in the development of a state, nation or institution. For example, Ranke’s well-known dictum “jede Epoch ist unmittelbar zu Gott” stressed the unique individual nature of each particular phase in the development of a state, nation or institution.

This means that there are two interpretations of the term “historism”, the second more or less arising from the first but nevertheless pointing in a different direction: the first advises the historian to take a dia-chronic, the second a synchronic point of view. As long as the two approaches are formulated in a loose and imprecise way they may overlap each other considerably as to what, according to each of them, the nature of a particular socio-historical thing in a certain phase of its development should be. But as soon as the diachronic and the syn-chronic approaches are followed consistently, their overlapping parts will steadily lose content. In the end this paradox inherent in historism will result in the complete evaporation of the individuality of socio-historical objects.

The historists of the early 19th century, whose historical intuition and sensivity still remains unequalled to this very day, were doubtless aware of the unpleasant dialectics implicit in their conception of historicism. Their solution was to attribute an “entelechy” to the socio-historical things they investigated as historians. What attracted them to the idea of

support to this conjecture. See G. Huppert, The idea of a perfect history, s.l. 1971; Chapter 8.
entelechy, or to the “historische Ideenlehre” as they called it themselves, was the suggestion that it is inherent in the essence or “Idee” of socio-historical things to manifest in the course of its development all the properties these things will in fact have. Thus, the entelechy of the seed of an oak is to pass through a number of different phases before it ultimately becomes a tall tree. Likewise the assumption that socio-historical things should also possess such an entelechy or an “Idee” enabled the historists 1) to speak of one sole thing developing through time and 2) to allow for very fundamental changes in that thing. Thus, historists might believe that the idea of entelechy or the “historische Ideenlehre” succeeded in reconciling the two divergent interpretations of historism with each other. It will be obvious, moreover, that historists saw the entelechy or “Idee” of socio-historical things as the “subject of change” that logically enables us to describe and to account for historical change: it embodies the unchanging individual nature of socio-historical things.

The entelechy or “historische Idee” may have satisfied the historist as a “subject of change”, but it cannot satisfy us. That plants, animals or even human beings (when considered physically) have such an entelechy may be plausible, but that, for instance, nations or such entities as German culture should also possess it is a good deal less obvious. The mistake made by the historists was that they located “subjects of change” in reality itself; admittedly a quite natural but nevertheless, faulty intuition. They believed that Germany or German culture should exist in the way trees, animals or human beings exist, and that an entelechy is present in these socio-historical things themselves, just as it can be said to be present and active in actual trees, animals or human beings. Reality itself was supposed to supply the conditions (i.e., in the idea of entelechy or of the “historische Idee”) requisite for the description of historical change. This fallacy arose from the belief that the consistency brought into the historical narratio under the aegis of the notion of entelechy or of the “historische Idee” was supposed to mirror a consistency in historical reality itself. Our ability to tell a logical and consistent story about the history of a nation was taken to imply that the nation itself had passed through a logical and consistent evolutionary rhythm (which might perhaps even be extrapolated to the future and could thus justify the objectionable political views of some 19th and 20th century historists). But the past itself is neither logical nor illogical, neither consistent nor inconsistent (see section (4)). Only narratios can be logical consistent, clear or unclear. Historism erroneously situated narrative logic, i.e. the logic that governs intelligible accounts of the past, in the past itself. The cogency of the historist’s own story of the past was interpreted as if some form of historical necessity reigned in historical reality itself.

Yet, although historists located narrative logic in the wrong place, they did have some valuable insights into its working. If we succeed in cleansing historism thoroughly of all its metaphysical accretions we
shall be left with the most satisfactory philosophy of history we can think of. In fact, profitable use has been made of historist notions such as “Zeitgeist”, the “historische Idee” of a nation or a cultural tradition, the so-called “historical forms” — notions that, obviously, all denote Nss. So we have ample proof that historists possessed a profound awareness of how history should be written. They knew that the historian has to construct particular (linguistic) individualities (called Nss in this book) which embody the historian’s interpretation of the past. All we have to do is to translate traditional historism from a theory on historical objects into a theory of historical writing.

One could say historism is the position half-way between essentialism and positivism. Unlike in essentialism, historists saw in history a process of change which did not leave the essence of socio-historical things untouched; nevertheless, they were not prepared to abandon the notion of the “essence of socio-historical things”, because they needed it as their “subject of change”. So, after all, historism remained quite close to essentialism; historists had historicized essentialism but not rejected it conclusively. Since the days of Locke’s critique of the notion of substance, positivism (to give a very wide interpretation to the term), has considered a thing to be no more and no less than the sum of the properties it has here and now. The historian’s assertion that a thing can have properties which are not manifest now, but which in the past were or in the future will be “activated” by the machinery of entelechy inherent in the thing itself, is utter nonsense to the positivist.

Can positivism provide us with a better account of historical change than historism, i.e. can it supply a more convincing “subject of change”? It must be admitted that the positivist’s approach to the problem seems more simple, more straightforward, more selfconsistent then the rather vague theories historism has offered us.

The positivist may reason as follows. When an object O changes, a number of the properties of O will remain the same during the change. If that were not the case we could say little else but that O has disappeared or ceased to exist. Before going on with my elaboration of the positivist’s account of change, I would like to make a few remarks on the positivist reasoning with regard to the disappearance of object O. I surmise that every example which might be adduced as an instance of an object O ceasing to exist can still be interpreted as a mere change in O. Whether we notice change depends on how we wish to look at reality, viz., on whether we wish to recognize individual (changing) things in reality, and if we choose to see change we shall see it. No conceivable a posteriori argument can ever refute the view that a thing that has changed should be seen as having turned into a different thing and that, consequently, the

thing we saw before the change has ceased to exist. However, if we adopt this view things will vanish from our universe, for what (kinds of) things are immune to change? Recognizing things and the justification for saying that one or more things cease or have ceased to exist are inextricably tied up with one another. When would we say that a thing has disappeared or ceased to exist? Take a footprint on the beach that is wiped away by the waves of the sea. In this case we could say that either the footprint has ceased to exist or that the configuration of the grains of sands has merely changed. We can decide both ways. But the former option requires the recognition of footprints as “things”.

Incidentally, there is a curious paradox here. Strawson has used the concept “basic particular” to refer to a class of particular things that serve as a basis for the identification of other particular things while the reverse is not the case. Thus the human body is a more “basic particular” than the feelings or thoughts it has. The paradox is that contrary to what we initially would expect, the more basic the particular the more pragmatic the choice or decision between change or ceasing to exist. When felling a tree, no doubt a very basic particular, we can adduce equally good reasons for both options. On the other hand it is well-nigh impossible to doubt that in 1945 the Third Reich — which is not in the least a basic particular - ceased to exist. Only the members of the “Rote Armee Fraktion” might have their doubts about that. Likewise, we may well say that in 1945 Germany changed but not that it ceased to exist, and “Germany” is not a more basic particular than “the Third Reich”. Apparently, criteria for deciding between change or ceasing to exist are less well defined for basic particulars than for their more abstract counterparts. At first this may seem astonishing. But our astonishment will vanish when we realize that basic particulars correspond to how we find the world (before having made any specific decisions as to what kind of particular things the world contains), while their more abstract counterparts correspond to how we have conceptualized the world (and by then our decisions on how to talk about the world have already been made and we should stick to them).

But let us return to the positivist approach to (historical) change. According to positivists, things only remain identical, or the same individual thing, during change in relation to some concept that in a relevant sense applies to them. This thing is identical with the one in the past because both are books, made of paper and cardboard and so on. Thus Borowski writes: “diachronic identity” is always “identity under some concept” and he continues: “for each concept which is thus that we ordinarily believe the instance of that concept to persist through time, there is a relation which holds between stages of the object at different times (the ability to apply which is part of a speaker’s grasp of the concept) which validates the claim that the stages are stages of a single
object of the type”\textsuperscript{22}. The close similarity of this proposal to what has become known as the thesis of “the sortal dependency of individuation” is obvious: this thesis has been formulated by Geach in the following way, “when one says “x is identical with y”, this, I hold, is an incomplete expression; it is short of “x is the same A as y”, where “A” represents some count noun understood from the context of utterance — or else, it is just a vague expression or half-formed thought”\textsuperscript{23}. In both cases, whether we talk of “identity through time” or, more generally, of “identity of two things”, identity is conceived as identity under some concept. It will be obvious, then, that the positivist has no difficulty in defining the “subject of change” when something undergoes change: obviously the concept that “covers” the thing during its different phases is the logical prerequisite for the description of change.

It might be argued that the concept on its own is too capacious to figure as a plausible “subject of change”: the concept, thus conceived, is not only the “subject of change” of this specific instance of it but of all its instances. So we should narrow things down a bit. Supposing the concept to be “C”, should we not expect the phrase “this C” to be the most likely candidate for a “subject of change”? Unfortunately, this is going too far. Whoever uses the phrase “this C” already knows how to identify this C during its metamorphoses. And what we are at present investigating is what concept will enable us to identify this C during its metamorphoses. Saying that “this C” is the concept we were looking for, the “subject of change”, is using what has to be explained as an explanation. For what we want to explain is how we can speak of “this C” while this C changes, and, of course, we cannot explain that by resorting to the same notion “this C”. In other words: the “subject of change” we are looking for must be part of the meaning of “this C” but not all of it. What part should it be? After what has just been said, the answer is not hard to find. It must be that part of the meaning of “this C” that makes the identification of this C during its changes possible, while not itself being the concept with which this C (i.e. “this C”) is actually identified. This offers us the following picture. When a thing is a C a number of attributes that are part of the meaning of C can be ascribed to it. The set of attributes that may serve as a basis for the identification of this C during its changes, while not adding up to the concept “this C”, can be taken to be the “subject of change” of this C.

Still, this is not the whole story. Things may change so radically that the concept that covered them during a certain span of their lifetime no longer covers them during other periods of their existence. Take, for example, a snowflake that changes into a drop of water. We shall, of course, decide to speak of change here: it would be absurd to say that the snowflake has completely ceased to exist and that a drop of water has appeared from nowhere. It is much more natural, though not

\textsuperscript{22}Borowski; p. 485.
\textsuperscript{23}P.T. Geach, \textit{Logic matters}, Oxford 1972; p. 238.
absolutely imperative, to say that the snow has changed into water. Anyway, even if one should doubt this, an account of change that takes care of such changes is a better one than an account that does not. So I think we should consider what “subjects of change” are like when no covering concepts are readily available. It is fairly obvious what course we should take in such cases. In the present example we are faced with two covering concepts (“snow” and “water”), while neither of them covers the thing during its metamorphosis. However, it is not difficult to conceive of a covering concept to facilitate our task, for instance, a concept that is part of the meaning of the original covering concepts, or a concept that has been specially devised for the purpose (maybe by scientists) like “H₂O” in the case of our example. After all, our intuitions with regard to continuity through change must have some justification. Let us call this category of concepts C’. Then we can define the positivist’s “subject of change” in the following way: when a thing changes, its “subject of change” is a set of attributes (either embodied in a covering concept or in a concept C’ or being a part of these concepts) such that these attributes may serve as a basis for the identification of this thing during its changes, while not being identical with the concept “this C”. For the purpose of the present discussion it is unnecessary to establish what precisely is the difference between 1) the set of attributes mentioned in the definition and 2) the concept “this C”. It is sufficient to state that there is a difference.

The paramount advantage of the positivist’s proposal for the definition of the “subject of change” over the historist’s proposal is that it recognizes a set of attributes (i.e. something on the linguistic level) as the “subject of change”. Positivism rightly claims that what logically permits us to speak of change is not part of the world itself but of the linguistic apparatus we use in speaking about the world. Nonetheless, I think that the historist is right in demanding more of the concept “subject of change” than the positivist’s proposal allows for. And it is certainly true that when we make explicit all the implications of the positivist’s proposal we find that these are not always in accord with our intuitions about change. An objection against the positivist’s proposal is the following. In our universe there is nothing that has no properties in common with any other thing in the universe. This implies that according to the positivist it must, in theory, be possible to see everything in the universe after t₀ as “identical through time” with anything in the universe before t₀. Some (set of) attribute(s) can always be thought of that can be truly predicated of the subject in a statement that refers to anything in the universe before t₀ and of the subject in a statement that refers to anything in the universe after t₀. Thus we could say that a cup of tea after t₀ is identical through time with a tiger before t₀ on account of some properties that tigers and cups of tea have in common (and also this tiger and this cup of tea). This is, of course, untenable and completely at variance with our customary notion of change. How could we avoid this counterintuitive conclusion that the positivist’s proposal seems to
force upon us? Only by resorting, I presume, to certain what we might call criteria of identity which decide what conjunctions of shared attributes are relevant in deciding on the identity through time of one thing with another. Criteria of spatiotemporal continuity are ordinarily the most obvious candidates, of course. When it is said that identity through time is always identity through time “under some covering concept”, this can already be taken as an attempt to formulate some such criterion of identity: the covering concept when looked upon as a bundle of attributes implicitly states what can and what cannot be regarded as identical through time with something else. So defining identity through time as identity through time under some specific covering concept(s) is equal to defining one specific type of cases of identity through time as if it were the general type. And for this general type the positivist claims that it is not so much the covering concepts but the criteria of identity associated with these covering concepts that determine identity through change. Therefore, the positivist can assert that these criteria of identity logically constitute identity: “because if we don’t take the criteria as providing logically necessary and sufficient conditions [for identity (F.A.)] it is not clear how we are to take them” (Griffin)²⁴.

Is it sensible to say that the identity criteria associated with our conceptual apparatus provide us with the logical basis of our notion “subject of change”? Do these criteria of identity give us the logical entity that makes the description of change possible - or, more precisely, do they define for each instance of change what this logical entity is like? I do not think so. It may be instructive to look back for a moment at the route the positivist has had us follow. Initially our question was: what is the “subject of change” necessary for any description of processes of change? Ultimately our discussion resulted in the suggestion that we should look for criteria of identity, i.e. criteria that permit us to decide whether something remains the same individual thing during change. However, and that is my main criticism of the positivist approach, this search for identity criteria only makes sense when “subjects of change” have already been taken for granted and attention is focused on the more subsidiary question of how precisely change has been, or is to be described. But an inquiry into these criteria of identity has to be carefully distinguished from an inquiry into the logical nature of identity through change and time. Similarly, the criteria for determining someone’s moral or juridical guilt do not reveal to us the meaning of the word “guilt”. We can conceive of automata or computers that can, in relatively simple cases, establish offences of historists without “knowing” what traffic-offences are: they are only machines. Positivism accepts the language of change as given and only investigates how this language is actually being used. But that is tantamount to accepting as simply given what we want to explain in the present discussion.

It is most illuminating in this context to note the difficulties which

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²⁴ Griffin; p. 50.
the positivist’s approach leads to. Sometimes it proves to be very hard to
determine the criteria of identity associated with a particular covering
concept. Personal identity is a good example. Some philosophers propose
continuity of memory as the criterion of personal identity, some prefer the
spatiotemporal continuity of the human body and still other solutions can be
thought of. All these proposals can be challenged by cases where the
criterion is useless. Take the memory-criterion. What can we say about
personal identity when the brain (in which memory is situated) of one
person is transplanted into the skull of another person; or when one
hemisphere of the brain is left where it was and only the other half is
transplanted (neuro-physiologists have discovered that one hemisphere
of the brain can do what two hemispheres ordinarily do together)? Since
the days of Locke an impressive amount of ingenuity has been invested
in attempts to solve this kind of “puzzle-case”. However, I agree with
Parfit (and others) when he doubts if these “puzzle-cases” will ever be
solved conclusively. When we learn to use a concept — for instance the
concept of a person — we learn, at the same time, criteria of identity
through time and change for the things denoted by the concept.
Consequently, we should never forget that these criteria never reflect
more than our actual use of the concept. So when we are confronted with
the puzzle-cases, which naturally lie beyond our actual use of the concept
under investigation, we can never expect the concept to conjure up a
criterion of identity that will help us in the puzzle-cases. Therefore, the
assumption that the puzzle-cases would reveal to us the criteria of
identity that are associated with some concept — and it was this
assumption that made some philosophers construct the puzzle-cases — is
fundamentally unacceptable. Beyond our actual use of concepts there is not
some ultimate authority we can appeal to in order to find out what the
criteria of identity of the concepts are. Outside language itself these
criteria have no anchor that we can discover by putting language to some
pretty though tests. Criteria of identity only reveal themselves in the
actual use of language. The upshot of these considerations is this.
Criteria of identity are not — as the positivist believes — the logically
necessary and sufficient conditions for identity through change and time:
they only reflect or mirror the way in which we actually decide in
matters of identity through change and time. Consequently, the
positivist’s criteria of identity cannot answer the question as to what
are the logical entities are that enable us to describe change i.e. what
the “subject of change” are. The criteria of identity lie, so to speak, on
the wrong side of our actual use of language: they derive from our
recognition of “subject of change” and do not explain it.

A metaphysical reformulation of the same point would run as follows:
the positivist simply accepts as given that our universe contains certain
(types of) things and then investigates how the language we use to
describe change reflects this state of affairs. Surely, as soon as there

25. See Parfit; pp. 3-4; Borowski; pp. 494 ff.
are (types of) things there are also things which remain the same thing during change - the criteria of identity associated with the concepts of these (types of) things will see to it that we recognize instances of these (types of) things as the same. But, of course, this reveals to us neither the source nor the justification of the language of change we employ. The positivist only gives a description and not an explanation of the language of change.

Although he wishes to dispense with criteria of identity, a similar criticism can be levelled against Wiggins’s most recent account of change. Inspired by Aristotle, Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke, Wiggins replaces the reliance upon criteria of identity by something which enables us to answer so-called “what is x”-questions (where “x” refers to an individual thing): “the Aristotelian what is it question does both less and more than provide what counts as evidence for or against an identity [i.e. what criteria of identity are supposed to do]. It does less because it may not suggest any immediate tests at all. It does more because it provides that which organizes the test or evidence, and that which has been wanted by whoever has asked for a criterion of identity in the sense that Frege did”\textsuperscript{26}. These “what is x”-questions enable us to decide what sortal predicate applies to a thing and Wiggins answers them in conformity with the relevant ideas of Putnam and Kripke: “x is an f (horse, cypress tree, orange, caddis-fly ...) if and only if, given good examplars of the kind (this, that and the other particular f), the most explanatory and comprehensive true theoretical description of the kind that the examplars exemplify would group x alongside these examplars”\textsuperscript{27}. But “what is x”-questions can only be meaningful when what “x” refers to can be separated from its surroundings with sufficient precision. Type-concepts (e.g. sortal predicates) enable us to do this. So we can only answer these questions when type-concepts have previously been given to us (these type-concepts may be more general than that which is expressed by the most accurate description of a thing)\textsuperscript{28}. And when type-concepts are accepted as given, identity through change has been accepted as given too, because part of the function of these concepts is to enable us to recognize a thing as the same thing during a process of change. We can discern here the same vicious circle as in the preceding paragraphs.

That leaves us, lastly, with the narrativist proposal for a definition of the notion “subject of change”. Narrativism, we found, proposed the concept of “narrative substance” to embody interpretations of the past.

\textsuperscript{26} Wiggins; p. 53.
\textsuperscript{27} Wiggins; pp. 78-80.
\textsuperscript{28} Ayer also criticized Wiggins's tendency to take type-concepts for granted instead of explaining them: "Wiggins's assumption that the conditions of identity for a persistent object are somehow made available to us in advance of its appearance seems an unwarranted concession to the doctrine of innate ideas". See A.J. Ayer, What is what, London Review of Books, 22 January-4 February 1981, p. 7.
These interpretations of (parts of) the past are — roughly — interpretations of the history of things in the past. Or — if we prefer to be a little more cautious - in narrations certain terms are introduced (such as “Germany”, “Louis XIV”, “the Renaissance”, “the decline of the Church”) to which an extensive set of attributes (such attributes are always statements and not what can be found in the predicational part of the statement) is predicated either explicitly or implicitly. These terms denote, in narrativist terminology, “narrative substances” and it therefore seems natural that narrativism will advocate the candidacy of its “narrative substances” as “subjects of change”.

What about Nss as “subjects of change”? Like positivism narrativism avoids the mistake of locating “subjects of change” in (historical) reality itself: unlike historism it does not postulate some mysterious property of things in the past that causes these things to take on in due time the appearances they actually had in the past. But narrativism is even more consistent in its preference for the linguistic level than positivism. As we have just found out, positivism has a strong tendency to accept as given the way we divide our universe into individual things, not regarding it as something that has to be explained from a point of view prior to our actual arrangement of the universe. This tendency may very easily lead us to suppose that the individual things we recognize in reality “are really there”, even before our conceptualization of reality. This is, in fact, the essential fallacy in the positivist’s argument.

The decisive advantage of the narrativist over the positivist approach lies in the fact that the former does not require that the subject in the statements that add up to a Ns should all refer to the same individual thing. Narrativism does not specify any criteria as to what the subject of the statements contained by a Ns should refer to: and in an ordinary narratio these subjects will always vary greatly from statement to statement. This particular fact enables the narrativist, in contrast to the positivist, to explain identity through change and time instead of proposing a theory that merely reflects our actual habits with regard to the description of identity through change and time.

It will immediately be obvious that Nss, being sets of statements, satisfy even our most exacting requirement for an acceptable “subject of change”. For sets of statements undoubtedly permit us to describe change and they do so without a) presupposing change and b) presupposing identity through change. Even when they actually describe change they do not presuppose change, because they enumerate states of affairs in historical reality without necessarily specifying an inter-connectedness between these states of affairs that is characteristic of change. If they express change, this is a capacity quite peculiar to the set of statements in question and which such sets do not necessarily have. Neither do such sets of statements presuppose identity through change and if they actually describe the change through time of one and the same thing, the corresponding statements can always be rewritten as follows: “there is a thing that is p at t₁, “there is a thing that is q at t₂” etc. thus without
implying that the *same* thing should be referred to by the subject-term of all these statements. To sum up, describing change through time is a capacity of specific sets of statements which they do not possess necessarily but contingently and *if* they do possess it we may speak of change. Therefore, change corresponds to a specific capacity of *some* Nss (i.e. sets of statements).

When do sets of statements *have this contingent* capacity of describing the change of a thing through time? In Chapter VI, section (2) we shall see that Nss can be typified intensionally and extensionally. For our present discussion, however, only the intensional typification is relevant. An intensional typification claims the existence of a specific type of Nss which all share a well-defined set of statements. An intensional typification is equivalent to the assertion that reality should contain types of things that are all \( a_1, a_2, \ldots a_n \). In this way, types of *things* (dogs, chairs etc.) come to be recognized, all having certain properties in common. That such intensional types of Nss can be discerned is a contingent fact concerning *some* Nss, dependent upon what reality happens to be like as well as upon the pragmatal considerations that induce us to recognize certain intensional types of Nss in preference to others. Suppose we have an intensional type of Ns \( T \) denoting the class of things \( t_1, t_2, \ldots \). We may then say that it is a necessary and sufficient condition for a sequence of statements to be a description of the historical change of \( t_1, t_2, \ldots \) that it should be a Ns of the intensional type \( T \). It is a necessary condition — if a set of statements forming a Ns is not of the intensional type \( T \) it cannot describe the change of a \( t \) — and a sufficient condition — if a set of statements forming a Ns is a Ns of the intensional type \( T \) it describes the historical change of a \( t \). Therefore, the narrativist’s proposal that “subjects of change” should be identified with those Nss belonging to intensional types of Nss, presents us with a satisfactory interpretation of the notion “subject of change” which avoids both historist metaphysics and the positivist’s circular reasoning. Nss enable us to give a philosophical explanation of the description of change a) without dogmatic recourse to entelechies present in extra-linguistic reality and b) without presupposing change. As far as the latter claim is concerned, circularity has been avoided by acknowledging that a necessary condition for an acceptable account of change is to *explain* the existence of types of things and their sortal concepts instead of *assuming* it. This condition - disregarded by the positivist - is met by taking care that “subjects of change” are not restricted to the (type-)concepts of types of things (or to the criteria of identity associated with these concepts): in our account *complete* Nss, i.e. not those *parts* of them embodying type-concepts, are typified intensionally. Change cannot be explained without an explanation of how types of things come to be recognized. Nevertheless, the narrativist proposal closely resembles that of the historist: it is nothing but the transposal of the entelechy or “histo-rische Idee” - which according to the historist should inhere in historical reality itself - to the linguistic level of the narrative
representation of the past. The narrativist agrees with the positivist that “subjects of change” are linguistic entities, but they differ with regard to the nature of these entities. The positivist’s proposal to that effect accepts as given the fact that the universe is divided into individual things persisting through change and time. The narrativist takes as his point of departure the description of mere sequences of states of affairs in terms of Nss while abstaining from the assumption of the sameness of things. Hence, he is capable of explaining how in some very special cases types of things, persisting through change and time come to be recognized (i.e., when intensional types of Nss can be found).

An important corollary of the foregoing consideration is this. As long as we are dealing with complete Nss while no intensional types are recognized, change remains, so to speak, “locked up” in the Nss. This will be the case with narratios on such non-recurring topics as “the Renaissance” or “the Industrial Revolution”. A history of the Renaissance between 1400 and 1550 does not isolate in the past a specific object whose evolution can be followed. Embodied in the Ns on this topic we have a process of change without a “changing thing”. Thus there can be “subjects of change” even when no changing things can be recognized in the past itself. This apparent paradox vanishes as soon as we realize that Nss (and “subjects of change”) belong to a more fundamental logical category than the concepts referring to types of things, and this is how it ought to be because otherwise “subjects of change” could not explain the possibility of describing the change through time of instances of types of things.

(7) A fundamental thesis of narrative logic. We can indicate Nss with the help of the following terms: “Louis XIV_{h_1, narr}”, “Renaissance_{h_2}”, “the emergence of a new social élite in the 19th century_{h_3}”, and so on. The indices “…_{h_1}”, “…_{h_2}”, “…_{h_3}” demonstrate that we are dealing with the Nss constructed by the historian h_1, the historian h_2, and the historian h_3; or, if another gloss is preferable, the Nss constructed in the historical studies h_1, h_2 and h_3. In accordance with what has been said in section (5) I would like to repeat that such an index can never be assumed to individuate particular Nss: the nuisance with Nss, in contrast to ordinary things, is that they can only be individuated by a complete enumeration of their properties. This may seem utterly implausible: surely this historical study contains one specific Ns, so how could one fail to individuate this Ns if one says that it is the Ns proposed in this historical study? However, suppose we have the labels of a number of bags, each label bearing the name of the owner and the airport-official has forgotten to fasten the duplicates of the labels to the bags. You may be sure that there is one particular bag belonging to each label, but you don’t know which one. You can only find out about that by calling out the names of the passengers mentioned on the labels and let them pick out their bag. Similarly, the indices “…_{h_1}”, “…_{h_2}” and “…_{h_3}” suggest how to set about with the individuation of Nss and to recognize them, but they do
not individuate these Nss themselves. The following analogy may be a further illustration. At an academic party we overhear a conversation between historians and we note that the name “Ranke” is often mentioned. The next day we find ourselves brooding over the question of whoever this Ranke might have been. So we ask our neighbour, who is fond of mystifications, and he answers: “look at p. 1162 of Vol. 18 of the 1973 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica”. Of course, in contrast to what we find on the page indicated, our neighbour’s instruction cannot be said to identify or to be an identifying description of Ranke: being just an instruction to carry out a particular action, his answer does not even have the linguistic form required of an identification or of an identifying description. In the same way the indices “...h\textsubscript{1}”, “...h\textsubscript{2}” and “...h\textsubscript{3}” suggest or indicate how to set about the individuation of a particular Ns, without doing the individuating themselves.

In the case of Louis XIV I have added the index “...narr” which has been omitted in the other examples of names of Nss. The reason for this asymmetry is that the term “Louis XIV” can denote both a narrative subject and a narrative substance: the term can be the subject in statements on the historical Louis XIV and it can be the embodiment of a historian’s interpretation of the French King’s life. Of course we must keep these uses of the term “Louis XIV” apart, otherwise it would seem as if there were as many historical Louis XIV’s as we have accounts of his life. Furthermore, undoubtedly to the distress of many of his contemporaries, Louis XIV was definitely not a sequence of statements. In the case of “the Renaissance” and “the emergence of a new social élite in the 19th century” the indices “......narr” have been left out, because these terms very clearly have only a narrative and not a referential use. But if anyone doubts the non-referential character of these terms, he may add the index “......narr”: in the next chapter I will try to dispel his distrust.

If then, the narratio contains names that should be read as “Louis XIV\textsubscript{1,narr}”, “the Renaissance\textsubscript{2,narr}” — or when Nss are constructed in the narratio to which such names could be given — the behaviour of these names in the narratio could be compared to that of the “black holes” in astrophysics. Everything with narrative significance is hungrily absorbed by the meaning of these names. Just like the black holes absorb the matter of this universe and make it into something that in some respects no longer belongs to this universe, so the Nss “eat away” the statements of a sentential universe in order to form a logical entity in another, narrativist, universe. In a way Nss are things but they are things that lead a vicarious life: they parasitize on statements on (historical) reality. However, unlike normal things that have their existence outside language itself, the things named by such terms as “Louis XIV\textsubscript{1,narr}” and so on owe their existence only to the narrative text in which they play their rôle. Like the black holes of astrophysics Nss (i.e. not their names) have a peculiar self-referential character: all
the statements they absorb point in their direction, while Nss themselves (not their names!) do not point to anything outside themselves, nor can they be used to express true statements on other things - they are veritable holes in the sheet of language. To pursue this astrophysical metaphor, whereas Nss differ from normal objects whose structure is determined by what emanates from them, they resemble black holes in that both owe their form or structure to what is absorbed by them. Nss do not lie before us ready for inspection from whatever point of view we like; we cannot come to the heart of a Ns unless we allow ourselves to be captured by it. Whoever sees only part of a Ns, sees, in fact, another Ns.

Nss have their ontological anchor not in things existing apart from them in extra-linguistic reality (as is the case with the components of statements) but exclusively and solely in themselves. The capacity of Nss to absorb the statements of a narratio also accounts for the accumulative character of narrative discourse: the Nss continually gather content in a way quite distinct from deductive or argumentative use of language. The conclusion of a deductive argument usually contains less than its premisses and never more; narrative discourse, on the other hand, moves backwards like a crayfish and adds all the statements it encounters to its previous store by translating them into statements on Nss. As soon as a set of statements becomes so complex that its content cannot be reduced to the sum of the meaning of its individual statements (see Chapter III, section (2)) these remarkable linguistic black holes originate in the text; Nss have come into being and a second kind of logical (narrativist) rule starts to operate. The term “narrative idealism” again brings out in a very suitable way the autonomy of Nss and the fact that the rules they obey are peculiar to them.

A term like “Louis XIV$_{h_{1}\cdot narr}$” refers to a Ns: this Ns consists of statements. These statements can, as we have said before, be looked upon as the properties of a Ns, called “Louis XIV$_{h_{1}\cdot narr}$”. These properties behave towards this Ns in all relevant respects as properties ordinarily do towards things. Several Nss can share the same properties and, like normal things Nss, too, are nothing more than the sum of their properties. Nevertheless, the relation of Nss to their properties has a specific logical feature that is peculiar to narrative things, i.e. Nss. Suppose we have a Ns, to be called “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$” that contains the statements “p”, “q”, “r” and so on. We can then say “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$ is p”, “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$ is q”, “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$ is r” etc. When we are dealing with ordinary things, likes tables, magnetic fields and so on, the statements like “A is p” (where “A” refers to such an ordinary thing) are usually, though not always, contingent truths. It is not typical of normal statements on states of affairs in (historical) reality for the predicate to be part of the meaning of the subject-term.

But in the case of Nss the situation is different. For statements like “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$ is p” “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$ is q” or “Nh$_{h}\cdot narr$ is r” are all analytically true, since it is impossible that a Ns should have properties different from those
it actually has while remaining the same Ns. Contingent statements cannot be made on Nss: all the attributes that can be predicated to Nss form part of the meaning of the subject-terms of the statements in which these attributes are predicated of the subject-terms. We can express this fact in a Leibnizian way as follows: the “complete notion” of a Ns contains all its predicates in a relation of necessity. In this respect Nss differ essentially from ordinary things; as soon as they lose or acquire a property they cease to be the things they were. In most cases ordinary things are indifferent with regard to some of their properties while Nss immediately adjust themselves to their properties. Just as a word cannot but consist of the letters of which it is formed, a Ns can only contain the statements that it does actually contain. The thesis that all statements expressing the properties of Nss are analytical is, perhaps, the most fundamental theorem in narrative logic.

This thesis may require some elaboration. What does it mean that all the properties of a Ns can be derived analytically from its “complete notion”? It suggests, above all, that narrative logic, thanks to its exclusive concern with the relation between statements and Nss, will give no criteria nor even the slightest suggestion as to how factual truth and falsity are to be distinguished. In this respect there is no difference between narrative logic and formal logic. However, narrative logic ventures even farther in this direction than most branches of formal logic. For instance, although a Ns cannot both contain “p” and not contain “p” narrative logic does not forbid that a Ns should contain both “p” and “not-p”. In contrast to prepositional logic narrative logic has no difficulty in accepting the truth of both “p” and “non-p” where “p” is a statement on a historical state of affairs. I would like to clarify this probably amazing pronouncement. If a Ns, to be called “N_1” contains “p”, the statement “N_1 does not contain p” certainly is in contradiction to this supposition, but it is not contradicted by the statement “N_1 contains not-p”; for what the latter statement, in its turn, contradicts is the statement “N_1 does not contain not-p” and not the statement “ N_1 contains p”. N_1 may, as a matter of fact, contain both “p” and “not-p” - narrative logic having no objections to such a Ns. Of course we should avoid such stunts in writing history, but we should be aware that it is formal logic and not narrative logic that forbids us to assert both “p” and “not-p” in one and the same narratio.

The fact that narrative logic studies the relation between statements and Nss suggests yet another item that we may add to our list of differences between historiography and the sciences. The sciences place reality on a cross formed by subject and predicate: they tear reality in two parts and ask which subjects and which predicates belong together. Of course the task of historical research, too, is to yield true statements on the past. But narrative historiography knows finer shades of meaning in representing historical reality than just fulfilling the requirement that the right predicate should be tied to the right subject. Narrative historiography must not only answer the question “is the statement
true?” but also the question “should this statement be mentioned in a narratio on S?” The predominance of the latter over the former kind of question has been emphasized by Weingartner. He says that when, for instance, a history of music or of science is written, individual names and facts are only seldom mentioned with the intention of making the reader aware of something that he did not know already; on the contrary, the historian’s mentioning of names and facts should be seen rather “as a way of identifying the real object of the historian’s concern [i.e. a particular thesis on the past]; it [i.e. a particular name or fact] is seldom included for its own sake”. In many cases the states of affairs described by the historian “are simply taken as there, just as one might describe the features of a landscape without any reference to the forces that are responsible for its existence” (where the inquiry into these forces does correspond to the non-narrative, scientific approach to reality). You could say that from the narrativist point of view the facts mentioned in a narratio should be seen as mere “illustrations” (of some historiographical thesis); the statements describing these facts function as mere contributions to a particular view of the past (without ever being this view itself) as embodied in certain Nss. When isolated from the narratio their value is negligible. Facts and statements are, indeed, instrumental in suggesting a particular interpretation of the past, but they should always be separated from these interpretations themselves.

This enables us to understand why such books as Trevor-Roper’s *The Rise of Christian Europe* or Cobban’s *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* are often so interesting and stimulating for historians. The facts mentioned in these books have nearly all been known to historians since their undergraduate years, but the “illustrative” use that has been made of these so very well-known facts is so out of the ordinary that new and fruitful visions of the past become possible. The same, for that matter, can be said of much of our daily conversation in which the number of new facts we impart to each other is usually very small. As much as ninety per cent of social intercourse may consist of endless variations of what speaker and listener have known for a long time. But that does not mean that ninety per cent of social intercourse should be superfluous. Conversational variations on well-known facts put these facts to new “illustrative” uses, and that is what makes it worthwhile to participate in social intercourse. Very often facts are mentioned not in order to convey relevant information but in order to create a point of view from which we are invited to see reality.

29. Weingartner; p. 46.