

**The hidden danger in talking about ‘narrative’. Entering a crucial debate in epistemology.
Is reality merely our narrative of reality?**

Narrative – from Latin: *narrare* (‘tell’, ‘make known’) – related to *gnarus* (‘knowing’) and ?Greek: *gignosco* (‘know’).

1. Plato, *Cratylus*. *Naturalism* (words represent something in reality) *versus* *Conventionalism* (the meaning of words is produced by social custom) *versus* *Nominalism* (words don’t tell you anything about the real existence of the things they name) *versus* *Heraclitanism* (‘things’ are an illusion fostered by words). Socrates seems to conclude that words imply that there is a continuing reality to talk about, but the use of words is mostly conventional. Foretaste of Platonic ‘ideal reality’.
2. W. Occam’s modified nominalism – to be is to be known (and talked about) *eorum esse est eorum cognosci* – cf. G. Berkeley – to be is to be perceived – *esse est percipi* – but this implies that there is *something somewhere* to be known.
3. F. Bacon – *knowledge is power*. ‘I am building in the human understanding a true model of the world, not such as a man’s own reason would have it to be.’
4. D. Hume (misunderstanding G. Berkeley): ‘the idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent.’
5. I. Kant (echoing J-J Rousseau) – Social Contract theory as an ‘idea of reason’ which has great practical effect – the theory causes lawmakers to behave in accordance with it. We know real reality as presented by the rational process of the mind.
6. J. Bentham – theory of *fictions* – taken up by H. Vaihinger – philosophy of ‘as if’ (*als ob*).
7. K. Marx (and F. Engels) - ‘social being determines *consciousness*.’
8. E. Mach - phenomenism - ‘things’ studied by science are logical constructions from sense data.
9. W. Dilthey - hermeneutics - our understanding (*Verstehen*) of reality (and hence of language) is the product of the whole of ‘lived experience’; and that understanding itself becomes part of lived experience.
10. G. Frege - sense and meaning - a word may not refer to anything (*Sinn*) but may have meaning (*Bedeutung*) - ‘the largest whole number’ - ‘social contract’. Echoed in Husserl, Derrida, Lacan.
11. F. Saussure - *signified* and *signifier* - linguistics might find rules about the relation of these two structures of language.

12. Logical positivism - Vienna Circle - L. Wittgenstein I - A.J. Ayer - language only has *meaning* if it can be made to refer to something verifiable through the senses - otherwise it is 'without-meaning (meaningless)'.

13. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards (echoing Vaihinger) – 'the meaning of meaning' – words don't have any fixed *meaning* – they have *uses* – especially *symbolic* ('gravity'; 'France') and *emotive* ('good', 'true').

14. K. Mannheim - *ideology*. Beliefs ('knowledge') – including those of social scientists— are a product of the context in which they are created. Geography, social class, inter-generation.

15. L. Wittgenstein II - language is a tool that we use pragmatically in communicating thought and feeling. Different kinds of language are useful for different tasks - no universal rules about 'meaning'.

16. J. Habermas - communicative action - *Kommunikatives Handeln* - constructing a *life-world (Lebenswelt)* through language - not arbitrarily but pragmatically, and according to socially generated norms of speech behaviour.

Cf. R. Rorty: 'epistemological behaviorism' (ruleless pragmatism). Cf. J.B. Watson (behaviorism).

17. P. Winch: 'The ways of thinking embodied in institutions govern the way the members of the societies studied by the social scientist behave. The idea of war, for instance, was not simply invented by people who wanted to *explain* what happens when societies come into armed conflict. It is an idea which provides the criteria of what is appropriate in the behaviour of members of the conflicting societies.'

18. J-F. Lyotard: 'I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives.'

[PJA: *Social Idealism*: re-making reality organically with ideas, including ideas ('ideals') that are more than merely words.]

Making international reality through words (post-1945) – *human rights* - *soft law* - *armed conflict* - *law of war* - *environment* - *international community* - *globalisation* - *international crime* - *duty to protect* - *regime change* - *international society*