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"How do historians and human scientists give knowledge meaning through the telling of stories"

The first story I remember hearing was the story of a little rock, who lived in a town with, big rock and strong rock and so on. Though this rock was not as big or strong as others when an earthquake ravaged rock town only little rock could crawl through debris to save the other rocks. What does this children's story mean? To me, it was about how differences should be accepted and appreciated. Even though I may not have had the words to convey I understood the moral and meaning. The narrative conveyed the message with more clarity. The ability to encapsulate complex meaning is what makes stories fundamental to knowledge, for knowledge is communicative. Even in most academic AOK's studies and reports employ stories to communicate complex concepts in much the same way the story little rock does, through metaphor and implication. Narratives give meaning by grounding something foreign in the familiar. Instead of seeking to perfectly encapsulate a concept the level of abstraction paradoxically leads to a greater understanding. Limiting ourselves to the AOKs of history and the human scientists the question becomes: How do historians and human scientists give knowledge meaning through the telling of stories?

In the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 a narrative emerged in the west, that proclaimed, its system had won in the ideological battle between communism and capitalism, dictatorship against democracy (Sassoon). This is best encapsulated by American historian and economist Francis Fukuyama proclaimed that it was *The End of History* in his 1992 book of the same name. However, amongst Marxists, post-structuralist and other heterodox reacted strongly against Fukuyama's position, challenging the very idea that history could have an end. Encapsulated by French historiographer and philosopher, Jacques Derrida's 1994 response to Fukuyama, *Specters of Marx* deconstructs the prevailing narrative and seeks to reveal the

implications therein. By examining both texts, one reveals the methods by which historians use narratives to give knowledge and imply directives.

Fukuyama's narrative detailed at *The End of History* ends with the fall of communism "…that is [to say], the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama)" In other words, beyond the fall of the Soviet Union, no more Ideology is possible. The first point of contention Derrida raised is against the idea of the end of Ideology. As fellow Marxist philosopher Zizek might put it 30 years later an "ideological fantasy." Derrida believed "Capitalist societies can [now] heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished..." For Derrida, the narrative of no more ideological was inherently an ideological proposition. The narrative that history had concluded was itself unfinished. This unfished narrative, Derrida argued could indeed never be finished as "…They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself. a ghost [such as Marxism] never dies, it remains always to come and to come back." As Derrida saw it the narrative Fukuyama pushed in which Marxism and communism were thoroughly defeated was precisely how Marxism lived on.

Derrida thus argued that the narrative was not one seeking to present knowledge on history but to imply justification for an ideology. For Fukuyama, the present resides at the end of this narrative; Having triumphed, liberal capitalism is the only and most legitimate form of government. For Fukuyama, Derrida argued, this knowledge of the pre-eminence of liberal capitalism justifies the continued governance of the liberal world powers. Subtly it also implies that the end of all forms of non-liberal governance is soon to end (such as China). The implications of this knowledge have the result of making all critiques of the dominant hegemony

invalid as liberal capitalism has won there is nothing else possible. In *The End of History,* the past actions of all liberal societies are retroactively justified as a valid necessity for arriving at the present. For Fukuyama, the positioning of the present moment at the end of a struggle between modes of governance fundamentally justifies the mode of governance. On a personal level, although there are many benefits to the status quo, a narrative, such as that pushed forwards by Fukuyama, is dangerous as accepting its, seemingly harmless premises, that liberal capitalism is the only option, discourages and outright runs contrary to any critique of the systems of power, valid or otherwise.

On the other hand, the narrative Derrida constructs in response to Fukuyama in *Specters of Marx* place the fall of the Soviet Union in midst of the never-ending continuum, of history. In a distinctly un-Marxist take, Derrida claims there is no possible end to history, as histories themselves, are social and ideological constructs. So long as there is ideology, there is more history. For Derrida the question becomes "what happens and deserves the name of event, after history; it obliges one to wonder if the end of history is but the end of a certain concept of history." In contrast to Fukuyama this narrative justifies a critique of the current system but no inherent alternative ideology, as a critique of the status quo may be found in a wide spectrum of ideologies. For Derrida critiques of liberal capitalism do not end with the Soviet Union but must now expand to a critique of the narrative that liberal capitalism is indeed hegemonic.

In both Derrida's and Fukuyama's cases, there is a story, be that the story of the end of history, or its continued radical critique. Derrida in 1994 showed that Fukuyama's narrative justifies the actions and the knowledge of liberal capitalist hegemony (Salmon). Its meaning arises from this justification. Alternatively, Derrida's narrative in *Specters of Marx* is

comparatively simple it says history never ends (Salmon). The knowledge within tells those alternative ways of governance are possible. I find more appeal in Derrida's position as Simply by contradicting Fukuyama and revealing the ideological nature of *The End of History* the broader historical and political landscape is better able to critique how hegemony becomes normalized (Salmon).

Stories and narratives as shown by Fukuyama can retroactively change the meaning of and justify events. This phenomenon is most explicit in linguistics within the AOK of the human sciences. Within the field, there has been a major debate as to the origin of language. According to biolinguistics, language and meaning are manifestations of the inherent structure of the human brain (IvyPanda); This is the view most famously espoused by American linguist Chomsky in his 1965 book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Opposing this view French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure proposed in 1916 in *Course in General Linguistics* that language was a social phenomenon, that the origin of language was intrinsically connected to the development of society and culture (Saussure). What do these narratives, tell us?

In the case of Chomsky and biolinguistics, linguistic knowledge narrative becomes asynchronous. In any human society anytime, language arises. Secondly, if language is a function of the human brain problems of linguistics and ontology, become problems of neuroscience. Under this lens a study of language develops, evolves is used and shapes or consciousness is best understood as something fundamentally solvable and has a possible solution rooted in the induvial brain (IvyPanda) (Lemetyinen). This means that language is insubordinate to the human brain itself, which in turn reinforces the hierarchical worldview (Pallum and Scholz).

In contrast to Chomsky, the order of things put forward by De Saussure's and structuralist semiotic theory is distinctly (and in my opinion more appealingly) un-hierarchical (Aylesworth). To de Saussure the study of linguistics is intrinsically linked to all of culture and society. This makes a practical study into a specific question such as how language developed much more complex and far too large realistically solve, However, Saussure's approaches are far more useful in understanding and describing how language interconnects with society. It is, for this reason, the structuralists in the 1950s (Matthews) (Aylesworth), originated their ideas about interconnectivity within concepts and society with Saussure. As they postulated language was fundamentally inseparable from culture and meaning. The story of language according to Saussure is the story of humanity and may not have a practical answer to give, however, it acknowledges the role humanity has had in its development and the synchroneity that implies (Aylesworth).

The meaning of these stories of linguistics arises from how they invite us to view the problems of the field, their implications for knowledge and humanity itself. Is language describable? To Chomsky yes to De Saussure maybe. Is there a true nature of language? To Saussure, perhaps but it is lost to time and the fact knowledge of linguistics is necessary to form knowledge on linguistics to view it in objectivity. This statement was taken by the post-structuralist to be the most meaningful part of Saussure's story, that though the search may be futile that which it uncovers can have tremendous meaning. Fundamentally Chomsky and Saussure differ on this issue of where meaning arises, from the brain or from everywhere at once.

On the nature of how knowledge is imbued with meaning through a story, I tend to agree more with Saussure and Derrida. As seen stories imbue meaning by reframing, justifying and

critiquing knowledge. Knowledge can exert power by constituting the existing order or contradicting it. Knowledge can be given meaning by organizing it hierarchically or chaotically. Anyway, knowledge gains meaning through a story, stories only make sense with already existing knowledge. They too are inseparable and attempting to know a story, its knowledge or its meaning individually may truly be meaningless.

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