

Second Philosophy

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Title	Philosophy of History I
Date	04 April 2009

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time not so long ago history had a degree of certainty. It was the subject that told us about the past. Historians trained in the use of evidence (ie in rationally assessing its reliability as data to reconstruct what the past had actually been like) could uncover facts about the past and use these to construct a picture, most often a narrative, about what the past was really like. Having achieved this history could be used to assess all sorts of things that were seen as vital to the well being of society.

For instance it could give us a perspective on morality by giving us examples of the good and the bad. It could warn us against repeating our mistakes that led to disasters. In this sense it could be the source of moral improvement. As other social sciences developed history could provide data, as a corrective or justification, for all sorts of speculations and theories about our individual natures and the nature of society.

Of course there were disputes amongst historians. Did the picture of the past show that we were making progress or not? Were individuals more important than the great social movements of which they were a part? Could a pattern be seen in history and if so what was it, the rise a decline of civilizations or cycles of change? Or was there no pattern, was history just `one cock up after another`, an endless train of accidents?

However, fundamentally, history was secure as a profession, with a useful purpose and a reliable method that aspired to, and consistently achieved, a true representation of the past.

In recent times this view of history has been seriously challenged. Critics have claimed it is impossible to recover the real past. All we have are narratives that reflect the dominant ideologies, reflected in individual historians, located in the particular ideological space of a particular time.

As Richard Evans, a notable defender of traditional history, has said, of his critics views, "*The past is unknowable, all we can know about is historian's writings, so history disappears and we are left with historiography, as a species of literary endeavour. What historians write depends on their own purposes and their own point of view and there is no way of deciding whether one representation of the past is true and another contradictory one untrue.*"

This can perhaps be summed up in another way Jean Francois Lyotard's definition of postmodernity as, "*incredulity towards meta narratives.*"

The critics struck at the heart of the idea that empiricism could be used to recover and reconstitute the truth about the past. History was merely a series of time located `discourse`. In these `discourses` texts float free of their authors.

It is not only authors of evidence in the past who are dead; all authors are dead once their text is completed according to Roland Barthes. All `discourses` could be deconstructed, read against the grain, to reveal their hidden ideological assumptions, the very things that gave them their appearance, their posture of certainty truth and reality. No discourse could reveal reality as such, reality of the past existed but was fundamentally unrecoverable and a refusal to accept this caused serious problems.

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Deconstruction of traditional history was vital because the traditional paradigm of rational scientific history did real harm. For instance as it had developed in the modern era it excluded whole swathes of humanity from consideration. Male Western Eurocentric history excluded women, the colonial, black people amongst many others.

In more subtle ways the impulse to describe the effects of great social movements eg the economic forces that created social classes down graded and devalued the role of individuals as resisters of social change. For others the creation of spurious certainty about the past simultaneously created a sense of victim hood amongst some groups that prevented reconciliation and in others a sense of moral certainty that endangered the democratic process, a process that required relativism to function.

Richard Rorty was one who celebrated the reduction of history, and philosophy for that matter, to the fictive and the relative, seeing the fundamental unknowability of the past as essential for leading us back from false certainty to pragmatic decision making about our moral behaviour.

The supporters of traditional history have of course not easily accepted these criticisms. They claim their critics are just another breed of radical sceptics. As such their scepticism is self defeating. Historians have always been aware of the problems of cultural and individual bias. It was to get away from fictive history with its any interpretation goes approach that led to the professionalization of history in the first place.

Further if you break the link between interpretation and narrative and the reality of the past then you are committing a major epistemological error. Richard Evans points out that traditional history, by its correct conceptualisation of the nature of evidence, ensures that some interpretations are better than others.

It is true evidence can be read in many ways but these possibilities are not endless ie the evidence guides and them and excludes certain interpretations and favours others. Interpretations fit evidence and evidence reflects reality. Thus some interpretations are a better fit to reality than others.

If you don't accept this then history becomes a sort of parlour game, an extended reading club, where we all exchange our fictions. Worse if allows the powerful, the fundamentalist the extremist to appropriate a version of the past to use for their own ends. The traditional historians, the authoritative guardians of humanities conscience, will no longer exist.

So where do you stand on these issues? Is history relative or real and does it matter?

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the status of a work of history in your eyes?
 - i. An entertaining fiction?
 - ii. A useful fiction?
 - iii. A useful reconstruction of the past?
2. Is knowing the truth about the past dangerous or having multiple versions of the truth about the past dangerous?
3. If we can't know the truth about the past can we know the truth about anything?

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REFERENCES:

The debate over the nature of history is a huge area in particular the debate between traditional historians and postmodern historians. The following just scratch the surface.

This site of the **Institute of Historical Research** is the best place to start as it has various articles for and against postmodern criticism of traditional history:

<http://www.history.ac.uk/resindex.html>

A general **Account of Philosophy of History**:

<http://www.galilean-library.org/manuscript.php?postid=43796>

Usual scholarly survey from **Stanford**:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/history>

Postmodernism for Historians

Callum G Brown Pearson Longman 2005: Brilliant, short, clear and beautifully written account from a postmodern point of view but with criticism from traditionalists.

Philosophy of History, M C Lemon. Routledge 2003: Wide ranging heavy weight survey of all main issues.

History Theory Text. Elizabeth Clark: Very scholarly attempt to reconcile two sides.

In Defence of History Richard J Evans. Granta, 1997: The standard Traditional Historians defence.

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DISCUSSION:

Oswy: Over to you folks. Is history just fiction?

Aiji: yes, but with a caveat

Alaya: in some ways, many part of history are fiction for me, mostly the army's reports

Aiji: that fiction is meant here in the anthropological sense

Oswy: What do you mean Aiji Anthropological sense?

Sojourna: Yes, I would say history is a type of fiction, but not in the sense of being made-up, fiction in the sense of being a narrative. But it is useful, important and interesting.

Thoth: one thing - there are rarely 'sole sources' - it's possible to collect several versions and compare them. Also there is physical evidence. I think we can get a fairly good idea, even if inexact. enough to be useful, but not enough to ever say much with absolute certainty except for some very general, broad things or some specifics that are well documented by more than one source.

Aiji: in that the interpretation of history is a lens or framework which mediates between what happened and the story about what happened and from whose point of view

Oswy: Soj The critics say it is made up in the mind of the historian?

Thoth: how do the critics know, Oswy?

Sojourna: Thoth, yes, history telling happens in a type of framework which guarantees at least a level of usefulness if not a degree of truth.

Thoth: I think that says as much about them - or more - than about the people they are talking about.

Alaya: I mean it in the sense of the narrative aspect, being told as a myth or a fantasy of some sort of failure or of success, as a tale

Sojourna: Oswy - I think some history might be made-up in the mind of a historian, depending on their method and reasons for telling the story.

Aiji: Alaya, yes but not 'made up' - not free flowing, but rather based on reading the evidence

Aiji: knowledge is always for a purpose to some end

Oswy: the Post Modernists (PM) say that the evidence itself is mainly fiction to start with it is then selected by historians to put into narratives. The narratives are selections they are imaginative works.

Alaya: I see also made up recently being there since the last historical events

Sojourna: Aiji - yeah, reading the evidence, or maybe interpreting the evidence, which can offer up variations...

Sojourna: Oswy - could you clarify, what do they mean that the evidence is fiction?

Aiji: Soj exactly which would make history relational rather than factual or fictional

Sojourna: Aiji - yes, though with a leaning to and a yearning for fact

Alaya: in Canada we even have records, of fake facts being told from one factions of English to the French, to make them fail in the recovery of the land, and this was usual, and recorded

Aiji: Oswy, I think the PMs are often misread

Sojourna: Alaya - who knows or decides that they are fake facts?

Oswy: Soj The PM critics say that all evidence is a text. It's written or put together for a purpose. The author of the text is within a particular discourse. So you have a double problem the sources are texts and the final historian's narrative is a text based on these texts. So it is all fictive.

Alaya: sejourna, its not from an outside readers, it been told by the faction themselves, that they related fake fact to the French

Aiji: PM critics seem to be more concerned with the mediation aspect and that there is no unmediate access to the real; not that there is no real

Sojourna: Oswy - wow, yeah... what to say after the PMs! *thinking*

Sojourna: Alaya - ok

Oswy: Aiji PM was particularly critical of history. They say the only thing of value in history is the study of historiography as a literary form. The rest is worthless.

Alaya: also we have from the church , some real histories , about what they made believe , in the past

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Thoth thinks PM is perhaps as worthless. ;o)

Teleo: some people think that history appears to the human being not as a now moment ..eg. It works on a very large lag factor. In the sense that, even when we are talking about a NOW moment in history we are actually still operating in a past. In the sense that we don't ever understand what we are always dealing presently.. Only Art can deal with the present. in this way the present is always about some recent or near past. We may be in fact thinking in a mode that is always already or always -out of date-

Aiji: Oswy true, but that was about challenging the political power of those who claimed access to truth through history

Thoth: if that is their state of mind, then is anything they have to say of any more value?

Alaya: we have even a inner dictionary that wasn't the same as the usual one,

Oswy: The critics say history poses as something it cannot be ie objective in some way about the past. In fact the past is a distant country to which we can never go.

Sojourna: I'm feeling very PM at the moment, everything seems so difficult to pin-point and to determine (I must still be drunk on Parfit, but that's another matter)

Aiji: ah yes but I think that's where Foucault is useful...

Thoth: I am not sure it's possible to crawl into the head of a historian from 200, 500, 2000 years ago.

Aiji: in his author function he speaks of the sedimentation of history - which provides a cultural basis to agree morality ethics etc

Thoth: yes, they had their pressures, but they also had their obligations, too. Understanding the society and position/role of the historian in question helps a bit in interpreting what they are saying.

Aiji nods

Oswy: Aiji, it is ironic that Foucault uses history to discredit in a PM way the objectivity of history.

Thoth: to say that 'everything is junk. it's all fiction' is just posing, I think.

Teleo: we are sitting in a whole set of cultural artefact right this moment. This is the far past made to appear in the present

Sojourna: Thoth - yes on the obligations, which is something that probably saves history

Aiji: Oswy, I don't think that's what the PMs were doing

Oswy: Teleo, in a sense you are right. If objective history does not exist or can't exist then we are locked into an eternal present. The past is hidden. Period.

Teleo: PM is about a recapitulation to the past.. It engenders an end of the notion of linear time and modernist notions of progress

Aiji: but if we have mediated access to history it seems reasonable to say there are limits to what we know, but we can still know useful things

Sojourna: Not sure that the past is hidden, the past is what we say it is

Alaya: all historians are not similar, so I could , knowing that many recollections of facts were fictions in part, of made only from one aspect of the political power witch is the army's work, can by recollecting many others historian part , compare the version, and its not really difficult to make a clear picture out in details, but still a reasonable one

Oswy: Aiji I am mainly quoting PM historians like Keith Jenkins and Dianna Purkis and some others.

Aiji: yes but many secondary sources have not really engaged with pm other than to find and extreme to debunk it

Oswy: Alaya the critic's point is that you cannot make a clear picture of the past.

Teleo: by deconstructing the past PM attempts to both go back to the past and bring the past into the present.

Aiji: Oswy, agreed

Thoth: again... if their opinion on history is that it is all fiction and not worth more than a literary trek, then what value is what THEY have to say as historians or critics of historians? It seems to me that if they are going to include all historians in that definition, then they should include themselves.

Aiji: the problem seem to be the limitation of language itself - a first level metaphor

Alaya: well Oswy I think its possible only on some aspect at the time, yes, never the full world history no

Thoth: (talking about "PM historians") or are they somehow 'better' and 'more objective'?

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Aiji: Thoth, on the contrary the PMs were very aware of their own role in criticism

Thoth: are they? Really? Honestly?

Aiji: yes, I think that is precisely why Derrida's writing is so difficult - because of the level of self deconstruction undergone while writing

Oswy: Thoth, one thing the critics find useful is that they can read the historians accounts and this tells us about the ideology of their time and now. They also think you can be playful and write history of almost anything and anyone and do it ironically and semi pure fiction. It becomes a literary exercise. It has no value beyond that.

That's perhaps an extreme view.

Thoth: or are the setting themselves 'outside' of critique?

Aiji: Oswy, perhaps that undervalues the seriousness of play

Alaya: many historian are not historian, but other people, form many areas where some events have taken places, and that is bringing something very different than the officialise government versions, and they were not more in contradictions, but they didn't recall things as success or failure of the army

Teleo: if the present is always in a sense a fictionalised past then it would be accurate to assume that the past was also the same.. So also would be the present a mode of fictionalisation also.. So then one could assume it possible to deconstruct the past to see how a possible present maybe being fictionalised NOW...sheesh.. That was hard :P

Thoth: anyway, luckily there are other opinions aside from the PM set for us to work with.

Marya: makes sense, Teleo

Aiji: true

Thoth: and we, of course, are also free to formulate our own.

Oswy: Thoth the issue you are raising is a difficult one for PM. If everything is a text and part of a discourse then PM is a text and part of a discourse and has no objectivity.

Thoth: yes.

Oswy: Of course in extreme PM nothing has objectivity.

Aiji: the question then is about power and history

Teleo: indeed Thoth.. In fact that is a very important point imho

Sojourna: Oswy, what do you mean in extreme?

Aiji: actually they speak of the problem of absolute objectivity

Oswy: This raises the whole issue of knowledge truth certainty objectivity and the rest. in PM there cannot be any of these things.

Marya: well, there is more than likely 'some' truth in it Oswy - but I think that is the crux - that it can never be completely accurate, and I don't see a problem with that

Thoth thinks, therefore, maybe the PMs should all just pick up their toys and go home ;o)

Aiji: they acknowledge social reality

Thoth: they've made themselves irrelevant. ;o)

Aiji: the alternative is that if you claim to have objectivity then there is no history - it is fixed

Sojourna: Oswy - there cannot be knowledge in the absolute sense for the OMs but there is knowledge or knowledges

Oswy: Soj. There are many PM historians who don't rule out entirely the possibility of producing some history that has been rigorously done.

Alaya: the related paper, the style of the paper or the book, is having also something to tell about those who wrote it, but not always fully telling the way of writing of the place and time. They peper themself contain some style that are part of some fact, about social and literacy way to do

Sojourna: they are not saying you cannot know, only that you cannot know in the way we think we should know - ie absolute fact, absolute truth etc

Sojourna: Oswy, ok

Alaya: now we are going into the history of the history witch is very interesting

Oswy: Lots of points here forgive me if I don't get to you quickly.

Sojourna: Oswy, you are doing well?

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Oswy: Soj I think you are right. There are forms of narrative but we must be eternally sceptical.

Oswy: Thoth. The trouble is if PM is right then we all take our toys home.

Teleo: Thoth.. That maybe the case about making themselves irrelevant.. However it would still be a job done. In that that was uncovered is how we fictionalise.. and thus as you pointed out allows us now -using technology- a way in which we have a possibility to extend our creative ability to fictionalise... I am pro creativity btw.. so that doesn't worry me :)

Sojourna: Yes, and I think the PMs did one good thing, at least, helped us see that we must indeed be eternally sceptical. Well, at least for me.

Alaya: the local paper, and the foreign one aren't similar about this, the integral telling of the history

Aiji: Oswy agreed but that must include skepticism about absolute truth claims of some more traditional historians

Aiji: it seems to be that there is an asymptote of fictionality here

Thoth: well, Oswy ...I don't think PMs are right.

Thoth: of course, we can know nothing with certainty...

Alaya: there aren't fully absolute truths since nobody can have been witnessing the whole, since we see only in part, so this is the reason why recollecting as many pieces as possible is good

Oswy: Aiji Yes PM's still write history . They tend to go for deconstructive history emphasising how individual examples deconstruct what we think about great movements. Individuals often don't fit.

Aiji: tending towards creativity - but not too far or it would be incomprehensible, and tending towards reality but forever mediated by the conceptual frames of language

Thoth: even things we experience ourselves is subject to interpretation... however there is little point in taking it to the extreme, either. There is some truth, and utility, in historical accounts...

Sojourna: Thoth - yes

Oswy: they also look at people and/or groups who have been ignored in the grand narratives because they don't fit a pattern.

Aiji: Thoth - indeed and the PMs point is the absolute impossibility of either extreme

Thoth: it seems to me they DO take an extreme position, no?

Oswy: Thoth it depends what you mean by truth and utility. At its logical extreme the PMs say there is no objective truth, there may be some temporary truth relevant to our time. No more I think.

Aiji: only philosophically - just as skepticism can only be taken so far eg Descartes

Sojourna: Doesn't seem extreme to me, just seems the most modest position

Alaya: by recollecting as many pieces as possible, I didn't fall on a lot of contradictions, only we can never see the whole, aspect of the event, doesn't matter, I think that even with the fiction aspect, it really brings good information about the main political system, roots

Teleo: I personally think that PM was inevitable.. it is as a result of the ubiquity of information technology. to say that there is a Truth to historical accounts is to assume that we know truth now.. as this does not seem to be the case then it would follow that this was also the same, in regards to the past also.

Thoth: saying that all historical accounts are fictive and not worth anything in terms of learning the truth about the past... that is not an extreme position?

Oswy: Richard Rorty is perhaps a good example. He wanted to deconstruct both history and philosophy and science for that matter. He said famously that truth was just a matter of what you could get people to agree to at a particular time there was nothing stable about it. It's a pretty uncomfortable idea.

Aiji: stability is over rated - but he was making a philosophical point.

Sojourna: I'm not sure they are talking about those texts as being invaluable, or worthless, but rather that on their own cannot give a complete account of the past. Other texts/truths/accounts are also needed.

Teleo: Thoth, not if the present works in a fictive mode too... most peoples accounts of things are fictive. There are multiple arguments even now as to what is the case down the next street.

Thoth: in practical terms, he's maybe not far off, Oswy. I can accept that...in that context.

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Alaya: newspaper are a lot more bias today that historian were, but not talking about some Roman period there...where disinformation took place ... as well as in those past year here, knowing the untrustworthiness of some, its still an aspect of the period

Oswy: Alaya, You might be able to collect some evidence and present a temporary partial picture that convinces some people but that is all.

Aiji: perhaps that is all that historians can do - the micro narratives

Thoth: well, it seems to me that the PM position is based on assumptions that are highly debatable, at the very least. And any line of reasoning is only as solid as the initial assumptions it is based on.

Teleo: Thoth.. I think that is likely why they attempted to deconstruct..

Alaya: material evidences are there in may other field, that are often not link to historians, in art for example,, and in many other field, but very old historical event, cant be recall, since our world is biodegradable

Aiji: of course, but it seems that just as senses can be fooled we would surely need to be careful about truth claims of unmediated truth

Thoth: may be.

Oswy: Rorty said it was a waste of effort to hanker after absolute truth. We all had to find communal truths and hope for the best. I don't personally agree with him or the PM's.

Thoth: I wont pretend to understand what is going on in the mind of a PM. I can only address what their output is.

Aiji: of course - but what about the use value of history?

Thoth: well, it seems like it could be useful.

Aiji: can we still learn from it

Oswy: I agree with the more orthodox historians that what they are doing is related to the evidence.

Alaya: absolute isn't something to conceive, its only relative witnessing, but its taken as what it is

Thoth: of course, we don't often make very good use of it.

Alaya: witnessing

Teleo: that's very true about the newspaper Alaya. Good point.

Aiji: Yes, Alaya, but newspapers are notoriously unreliable witnesses!

Thoth: there is a lament from middle kingdom Egypt, about 4000 years ago or so... about how the country had fallen apart, civilization crumbling...etc. etc. Much of it applies now, and could be applied numerous times throughout history.

Sojourna: I also agree with that Oswy, but still open to the possibility that what they are offering, despite their best efforts and intentions may not be the complete truth.

Oswy: Soj to go back to points you made before. It is not like fiction because the evidence only allows a finite number of interpretations.

Alaya: we can see in the history of the history the bias in some period and country is much more evident, and not everywhere all the time

Sojourna: Take Archestratus on ancient Greek cuisine - however much you study the evidence of how food was produced, cooked and served, you can never know exactly what it really tasted like, or what it was like to eat back then...

Teleo: I think that Alaya's point that it is all an unreliable witness. A newspaper can only have taken its paradigm from previous modes of accounting for reality and truth... whose truths are we talking about for instance...etc

Oswy: Soj So some interpretations are better than others. Ie some interpretations correspond to the truth in a better way than others. History is about a correspondence theory of truth.

Aiji: or precisely the social milieu

Sojourna: Oswy - finite becomes infinite as more evidence is uncovered/discovered?

Thoth: huh?

Sojourna: Correspondence theory sounds good to me

Oswy: Soj .No I don't think so because each piece of evidence only allows a limited number of interpretations.

Aiji: Soj that seems more about the number of data points which support hypotheses - like scientific method

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Alaya: who point of view, is more what I can see Teleo.. and that is ok if one can take the subjective part of this, and take the paper as what it is,

Sojourna: Oswy - ok

Oswy: And some of these are better than others and so its whittled down. You might not get a single truth but you get a manageable number.

Sojourna: Aiji - ok

Teleo: indeed Alaya. So to take these things as such as that would seem rational.

Oswy: this is the orthodox defence of history?

Oswy: Could I move to another aspect of the question?

Alaya: yes always a number and that is very important to have many not a universal version, its not giving properly the quality of the art of the historical telling...itself

Teleo: nods Alaya

Oswy: Does it matter if history is important? I described historians as the keepers of the conscience of society. If we deconstruct it then it opens the way for any fundamentalist extremist to peddle their version of the past?

Aiji: Oswy it seems to me that the extremists were already able to do that

Oswy: To be blunt. Do we want to accept the Taliban version of history?

Marya: It doesn't necessarily have to follow Oswy, no - if a society is going to adopt some completely irrational way of thinking based on misinterpreting history, then they will do it anyway

Thoth: yes...

Aiji: by deconstructing then the extremist's position becomes less tenable

Sojourna: Oswy - the fundamentalists will always peddle their versions of history and always have, to the audience that wishes to hear that version of the past.

Thoth: like PMs in the 20th and 21st century ;o)

Alaya: well we can also see with many text the evolution of the historian himself, and the school changes if it happened... and that is interesting

Aiji: :-p

Oswy: Aiji But didn't we have a sense that there was professional history to oppose them. A sort of official version.

Sojourna: lol Thoth!

Aiji: Oswy, that simply didn't work for revisionist historians

Alaya: aww, don't trust all revisionist, they are the worst

Oswy: Take science if we deconstruct the official version then we open the way to creationism and alien intervention versions of science.

Alaya: :P

Teleo: Oswy, it would seem to me that, in light of everything we have said about many points of view then it would show any fundamental position up as merely one of many possible configurations.. And in this way, their claim to any fundamental truth would be instantly rendered moot.

Oswy: Same issue in history?

Marya: erm no Oswy - the same issue doesn't arise in science as it does in history

Aiji: not necessarily, it simply would show that scientific knowledge is the result of funding, politics and many other factors than the pure search for knowledge

Oswy: Alaya, how can you stop the unofficial versions if they are all on an equal fictive playing field?

Oswy: Marya, why not?

Alaya: we shouldn't make one version of history that is absurd in my sense since there are so many aspect that are not apparent to many and can be unto others without contradicting themselves

Aiji: Oswy, put another way, are all fictions equal?

Marya: why are we applying a rule that is appropriate to the subjective nature of our interpretation of historical events the same as applying that to science?

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Teleo: some fictions are more equal than others ;p

Aiji: :-)

Marya: that came out all wrong ... why are we applying a rule that is appropriate to the subjective nature of historical events to current scientific practices (is what I meant to say!)

Alaya: we shouldn't stop unofficial version

Thoth: yes, comrade Teleo.

Aiji: and that is the asymptote of fictionality

Teleo: heh

Alaya: they are also showing aspect of the oppositional politics party

Oswy: Marya The PM critics say that there are time related versions of science just s there are time related versions of history. The idea of absolute science or progressive science is a myth.

Thoth: well, if it's a good record, I don't mind.

Teleo: get the beers out

Oswy: Teleo, fictions are equal that's the worrying thing if History and Science are fictions.

Thoth: even science doesn't accept the idea of 'absolute science'.

Teleo: sure Owsy, but if its true then one can predict some things about what will be going on in the future

Aiji: Marya the question is why shouldn't we apply interpretive strategies to the history of science the way it is done for other histories

Thoth: I am not sure either, either that 'time related' science versions either however, is quite the same thing.

Aiji: Oswy, I think the term fictions is misleading

Oswy: Alaya, we cant stop any version if PM is correct.

Teleo: yes fiction is not a good term for this I agree

Aiji: perhaps one should say structures rather than fictions; it is more about acknowledging that there are multiple interpretive frameworks rather than one true history

Oswy: All Not sure why fictions is misleading. Constructs of the human imagination is that not fiction?

Thoth: different perspectives

Sojourna: I think that the more history resembles science (more evidence, more analysis, etc) the less problems it has in terms of validity. There is just something about science that is better or more valuable than on-scientific pursuits, in so far as 'the truth' is concerned.

Aiji: Oswy it is misleading because of the connotations of just making things up

Teleo: fiction is loaded and maybe in the correct way... but it will be a divisive tool in the future.. is why I was concerned

Alaya: progressive history yes, that is those good global' version" on many ways, including many papers itself, since it take time to get all paper s and info from all around ,it take so munch time

Aiji: Teleo, yes and rightly so

Oswy: Aiji Teleo. So is Creationism an alternative and equally valid interpretation of evolution compared to the orthodox scientific view?

Thoth: well, there is a lot of 'filling in the blanks' where history is concerned...

Marya: Sure Oswy, I understand and agree with that - however ... Teleo just said it, things can follow that show us something 'was' true in science (to the best of our capabilities at the time to know it) - whereas we cannot do that with historical 'events' to the same degree of accuracy. Still, I do think we can apply a healthy dose of reason when we analyse these things, and should be very wary of labelling things as fictional for example - it is only we lose our reason or take our thinking out of context, that opens up avenues for the irrational

Thoth: but not all of it is meant to be inaccurate, and some (hopefully much) is based on reasoned extrapolation from point x to point z.

Teleo: Oswy. I am not sure that any absolute truth about creation can stand up to what we are saying here.

Alaya: different perspective contains always some elements that can be uses, even not the text itself but the medium, lol

Aiji: creationism can be easily shown to have significant problems in terms of logical consistency and the remaining problem of origin

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Teleo: particularly if the creation explanation Oswy, is based in a formulation of a presumed past

Thoth: which version of creation, Oswy? And which 'orthodox' view of science?

Thoth: yes, Aiji

Oswy: All First on Fiction. Surely in fiction there are links to reality. If you write a crime story it has to fit a recognisable at the time reality. So it's not just fantasy.

Thoth: but the creationists, of course, argue, that 'good put fossils there for a reason'...

Aiji: yes that is one end of the scale

Thoth: ...often the reason being to test our faith; seems a pretty insecure god, if you ask me, but anyway...that's another question.

Marya: mmmm, Oswy, I think that is opening up a can of worms - creationism, by that rule, then would also have links to reality or any irrational idea for that matter since we cannot think of things without properties of things we are aware of or have experienced in some way, shape, colour etc

Alaya: it's not completely a fantasy but it can relate a literary style of the time for instance,

Oswy: All Lets not get too hung up on the detail. If you can't have truth in history then for PMs there cant be truth in the sense that many people expect it in any other field of knowledge. There are no privileged fields of knowledge in that sense.

Aiji: sure in terms of how they sequence events, but they would also have to show logically the necessary variations in time to compress creation but let today's time take its own pace

Alaya: I really don't think that historical fact area complete lie, its only occasionally and these occasion are fund by comparison with others versions and this is also part of those who were marking this period of time, at that moment,,

Aiji: it is one thing to say we cannot be absolutely sure of the truth out there, but another to say that with evidence we can agree some common interpretations that allow us to know something about ourselves and pointers to how society might be better in future

Oswy: I notice that when I mention creationism lots of you fell back on ideas of reason and logical consistency and the like. The PM critics would say whose reason whose logic. PM is that corrosive. That's why Rorty said it's our reason and it will do for now as long as we can persuade enough people to agree with it.

Thoth: you know, we never experience anything directly - nothing. We experience things by the effects they have in our environment and our interaction with it. But to say that all of that is fiction is also misleading...

Aiji: in the same way that philosophical scepticism - eg Cartesian - can only go some way before losing descriptive power

Marya: yes - which is why context is always so incredibly important, Aiji

Aiji: Marya yes and part of the PM process/critiques is that history was in danger of losing sight of the context

Teleo: Oswy, I think PM does open up a way for any recapitulation to a proposed past and allows it come back in to the present with less theoretical opposition... however, technology is such as SL, that all these past histories and versions can be recreated in a sing space and in a single Time.. You can predict therefore that there will be wars of ideology waged in virtualised spaces. Which is actually exactly why I came in to SL.. to watch it all happen.

Aiji: it is thus in all countries!

Oswy: Teleo, I agree that from a PM point of view it is an ideological struggle.

Thoth: it is our interpretation and our mode of existing that leads us to feel we 'see' something or 'touch' something. But that doesn't mean that our experience and interpretation is fictive, or that the fact that we have no direct experience of things means the experience in invalid or untruthful.

Aiji: Thoth - agree

Aiji: What about some of the other questions you posed in the reading?

Oswy: All I would just says that many professional historians have claimed a scientific basis for history. Not in the sense that it produces laws etc but in the sense that it uses reason logical and is problem orientated and used evidence. The PM criticism attacked all of that and so by implication it attacks the foundation of any science.

Alaya: many do write fiction but it doesn't prevent others to have a completely dramatic sense of literacy, and others only the sociologic view, but aren't they all part of what telling is about

Second Philosophy

Oswy: All, we have hit one hour so I will halt the formal debate but if you want to continue the issues I will look at some of the things we didn't have time to get to. Many thanks to all of you

Aiji: Oswy not necessarily - the PMs attacked the notion that science happened without context - ie funding sources committee power structures etc

Oswy: One thing we didn't get around to was the idea that if orthodox history is allowed to hold say then all sorts of groups get a sense of victimhood. It's written into their past. Some critics have said this hampers peacekeeping solutions. The old idea is that we can know too much history. eg Ireland and Palestine.

Marya: well, I think the problem there doesn't lie in the interpretation of history Oswy - I think it lies in people getting over themselves - none of us should take credit nor blame for what our ancestors have done - that is arrogant I think

Teleo: that's true too I would think Oswy. Makes sense that, that would be a structural outcome of that way of doing orthodox History too.

