

Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. ISBN 798-1-137-40986-7.

This book is highly recommended for all historians and historically oriented American Studies scholars. Besides arguing for historiography as first and foremost a rational practice Kuukkanen's brief book provides us historians (and cultural studies scholars) with a fascinating introduction to what philosophers think of us. What makes Kuukkanen's view postnarrativist is the goal of redefining the status of a historian from that of a "descriptivist storyteller to that of a practical reasoner" (67).

Kuukkanen's notion of historiography as a rational practice arises from thorough analysis of a number of philosophers, although he clearly sees Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit as his main opponents. Kuukkanen's perspective may be too dismissive of the narrativist school's central conception of human understanding as fundamentally dependent on the form of narrative, regardless of whether we rely more on poetic, rhetoric, or logical elements in our constant effort of meaning-making. To be sure, Kuukkanen states clearly that he does not wish to delve into phenomenological discussions of the ultimate nature of human experience, which is also his rationale for setting aside Paul Ricoeur and other representatives of the school of phenomenological narrativism. The question, however, remains whether even White's or Ankersmit's theorizing is ultimately graspable without a commitment to the linguistic elements of our very existence, at least deeper than that "they understand narrative as a linguistic condition of a historical presentation" (p. 25). For example, Ankersmit's notion of making the past again present via its textual representation may well be something more than merely his way of rejecting one or another "copy theory of representation" (35).

The main point on which Kuukkanen agrees with both Ankersmit and White is that we should not aim at any actual discovery of the past. Rather historians' stories or analyses may only make "the past become intelligible" (37). Hence, the past has no inherent meaning; historians create its meanings. What, in turn, appears to be the narrativists' most clear-cut error, according to Kuukkanen, is their holism, the notion that every history book should be considered as a coherent whole in order to grasp any of its meaning(s). What kind of holists that makes them remains unclear, for surely holism may refer to many things beyond books of history as objects of linguistic analysis.

Kuukkanen's own theory of a "postnarrativist" historiography seems appealing and well-grounded. One of the keys is the historians' constant use of colligatory concepts, such as Renaissance or Jacksonian democracy. Kuukkanen clearly sees colligation as the very heart of the discipline of history as an argumentative practice to begin with—albeit his formulations of the ultimate significance of colligatory concepts are confusingly unphilosophical in holding them as simply the most "powerful features" or "the most interesting feature" of all historiography (106, 128).

Kuukkanen's actual recipe for looking at historiography as a rational practice includes three basic dimensions: epistemic, rhetorical, and discursive. Drawing mainly on the American pragmatist school (and among other things on Dewey's famous concept of "warranted assertability"), he understands the epistemic as part of the cognitive and eventually knowledge itself as any claim that compels one to accept it (136). Quite logically, then, rhetorical elements of historical knowledge arise simply from persuasion based on a set of effective argumentative strategies. Finally, the discursive dimension emerges with the scholarly community as a given framework within which any meaningful historical claim occurs. One may wonder whether all this makes "the plausibility of a historical thesis" simply dependent "on its impact within the argumentative field" (163). No doubt, the field itself is under constant change and may well be ripe to grasp the best thesis (say, about the reasons of the First World War) only a decade or two after its original publication. The main point, nevertheless, sounds absolutely correct, namely that whenever an argument is made, it definitely has to do with the earlier (mis)understanding(s) of the topic.

By no means is this an attempt to reveal Kuukkanen's view in its entirety. One must read the book in order to grasp the grounds for his notion of historiography as a rational practice—a view all the more appealing given its commensurability with what we historians generally do. That of course does not yet make the theory true. Perhaps we are all mistaken.

We all nod occasionally, and Kuukkanen might reconsider some of his most unqualified formulations. He states, for example, that "not even God could know what history 'really is' because there is 'no real' history in the sense that the past would have an inherent and given shape" (151). Surely one could ask why God cannot know what history is all about. Should God be omnipotent, s/he could pretty much determine what to make of history, shape or no shape. The only alternative is certainly not that of subscribing to some metanarrative conception of the past (or of apparently ongoing

history) as a coherent entity. Holding that the past simply has no plot, no coherence, no inherent rationality might be claiming to know too much. Why risk it? Or, can be we now be absolutely certain that “historical reality is non-narrative and non-verbal in nature” (42)?

What generally took place in history seminar rooms after White’s famous linguistic turn was probably a good deal less than philosophers tend to expect. One would hope that Kuukkanen’s book will be used for studying methodological issues in those very seminar rooms, given that, among other things, he maps the latest philosophical quarrels about historiography with admirable clarity.

Ari Helo

University of Oulu

Raanan Rein and David M. K. Sheinin (eds.), *Muscling in on New Worlds. Jews, Sport and the Making of the Americas*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. 203 pages. ISBN: 9789004284487.

The introduction to this collection states that the nine articles “advance the common theme of sport as an avenue by which Jews threaded the needle of asserting a Jewish identity while ... integrating a range of identities that dovetailed with their Jewishness in myriad forms.” The individual chapters consider subjects as varied as traditional sports like soccer, baseball and boxing as well Jewish yoga, cinema and Jewish Latin American fiction and soccer. They seek to refute the common stereotype of the bookish, effeminate Jewish male and at the same time demonstrate how Jewish men and women have participated in athletic activities on the national and international stage.

The initial article “What Ray Arcell Saw in the Shower” by David Sheinin describes what he sees as the end of Jewish boxing. However, more significantly, the text involves performing Jewishness. The reference is to Jewish heavyweight champion Max Baer’s trainer claiming Baer was uncircumcised, thus precluding his Jewishness despite his boxing trunks being adorned with a Jewish star. Sheinin further discusses Mike Rossman, a light-heavyweight champ in the 1970s, who also wore the star on his trunks. Rossman’s real name was Michael DiPiano. This clearly questions their perceived identities.

Raanan Rein’s “My Bobeh was Praying and Suffering for Atlanta” details the connection between Jewish Argentines and the ability of soccer as