

CANON AND GRAND NARRATIVE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

J. Randall Groves

Abstract: Three recent thinkers, Arthur Danto, David Gress and Ricardo Duchesne, have proposed philosophies of cultural history that emphasize the importance of narrative, canon and Grand Narrative. An examination of their views will suggest that contrary to the postmodernist announcement of its death, Grand Narrative is very much alive. In this paper I propose a conception of Grand Narrative that accepts key postmodern criticisms but can still function in the ways Metanarratives traditionally function. The result is a defensible conception of Grand Narrative that is limited in its claims and purpose yet provides the organizing structure that traditional Grand Narratives have provided.

Introduction

In 1984 Francois Lyotard published his famous postmodernist manifesto, *The Postmodern Condition*. In that work he announced the end of the Grand Narrative, and since that time the postmodernist position is one that while it may not be dominant, is certainly widely held. While it is true that there is widespread skepticism that any particular Grand Narrative can function in the traditional fashion, providing an unequivocal foundation for a way of living, this has not stopped scholars from producing and defending Grand Narratives. Three individuals, David Gress, Arthur Danto and Ricardo Duchesne, go against the prevailing trend away from Grand Narrative. All three thinkers address the use of narrative, interpretive analysis and canonicity. If the canon of great works and the ideas in them have had significant effects on world history, then these works and ideas merit special consideration in education. The canon of great works is becoming ever more neglected in education, so this paper can be read as an attempt to push back against this trend.

In this paper I argue for a more subtle conception of narrative in our understanding of world history. I will argue that this review of the arguments of Collins, Danto, Gress and Duchesne suggests a new narrative approach, namely “multinarrativism.” Multinarrativism is the view that there can be more than one metanarrative and that it is a good thing that there is more than one. That there are many competing metanarratives is not controversial; what may be more controversial is the claim that they can co-exist conceptually. While a secular European metanarrative of the rise of the West based on certain early advantages is not compatible with a post-colonial argument that the rise of the West was due to the plunder of the non-West, the two narratives have produced increasingly more sophisticated versions of each other. Not only can they co-exist, the interplay of all the competing metanarratives is the best thing that could have happened. Metanarratives fail when the conversation stops. Metanarratives are organizing principles applied to a changing historical landscape. The on-going interpretation of

the landscape is a necessary condition of living in one. Any interpretation becomes a narrative the clearer it becomes.

The most “meta” of the metanarratives is, of course, the philosophy of history. The philosophy of history, however, is in a problematic state. The early substantive or metaphysical efforts about the course or shape of history gave way to a positivistic focus by Analytic philosophy of history on epistemological issues, which, in turn fell from grace (Danto, 1995). Both the metaphysical and epistemological approaches seemed to have run aground. At the same time, the historical profession became rather more interested in the rise of the West, the core issue that interested the early substantive philosophers of history. The historical profession, however, addresses the issue empirically. Nevertheless, it is very interesting to note the return to Hegelianism in both Danto and Duchesne.

Hegel’s philosophy of history has few defenders in the history profession, but the issue at the core of his theory, the rise of the West, is now securely within the domain of professional historians, particularly economic historians, and historical sociologists, and they have produced their own interpretations of the rise of the West. Besides Hegel, the other great philosopher of the rise of the West is Max Weber, whose monumental work on comparative civilization with its analysis of the Protestant Work Ethic was the definitive explanation of the rise of the West until the more recent rejection of his views. Max Weber’s theory of history allocated a prominent role to culture and ideas in his explanation of the rise of capitalism. Most of the important arguments in recent years over the rise of the West, however, have been in economic history. The thrust of much recent work is that Weber’s theory on the basis that it has been refuted empirically. Weber’s theory has been under a withering attack from economic history for several years, but it has always had its defenders. This paper discusses the work of a recent defender of Weber, Ricardo Duchesne, who not only makes a spirited defense of Weber, but also offers his own theory, which makes ample use of narrative explanation. If we look at Duchesne’s narrativism in the light of the arguments of Danto and Gress we can construct a more sophisticated approach to Grand Narratives and the idea of the West.

I. Danto: *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*

Danto’s case is interesting because it comes from someone originally opposed to substantive philosophy of history. It was only when he turned his attention to the “end of art” thesis that he felt constrained to propose a substantive philosophy of history, at least in the area of art. The End of Art thesis might be understood as a subset of the general “End of History” thesis that is popular nowadays with the publication of Fukuyama’s book on the subject. Although Danto gets his version of the end of history from the same source, Hegel, Danto’s and Fukuyama’s “ends” are of different types. In fact, the end of history and of art are oddly incongruous. While the end of history, according to Fukuyama, is marked by an intellectual *convergence* with the triumph of liberal democracy and market capitalism, the end of art, according to Danto, is marked by a conceptual *divergence*, with no particular art styles or

movements ascendant. However, in both cases, the claim is that the historical argument is over.

Danto draws on Marx's rather than Fukuyama's idea of the end of history, and so remarks that "In both conditions—the end of history and the end of art—there is a state of freedom in two senses of the term. Human beings, in Marx and Engel's picture, are free to be what they want to be, and they are free from a certain historical agony which mandates that at any given stage there is an inauthentic and an authentic mode of being, the former pointing to the future and the latter to the past. And artists, at the end of art, are similarly free to be what they want to be—are free to be anything or even to be everything, as with certain artists...who have rejected a certain ideal of purity" (Danto, 1997 45).

Danto does not say that the end of art means the production of art will stop. There will be art after the end of art just as there was art before the advent of art, as Hans Belting argues. What will not be the case is that any art style will be "mandated by history." There will be no sense that the "next big thing" will be a logical outgrowth of our previous understanding of art. Art is now divorced from aesthetics. Art need not defend itself in terms of a metanarrative. Art movements during the era of art define what counts as art and what is ruled out of the category for being historically irrelevant. Modernist artists are always on the lookout for the "true art." The era of art was the era of the manifesto proclaiming the next historical stage in art history. It was the era of the artistic Grand Narrative that puts the history of art into context with a postulated end point from which we are to judge true art from its faulty predecessors. In this way was the academic painting of the late nineteenth century admired for its technique but ultimately ruled out of court for not being part of the dialectic of the era of art. The academic painter Bougeureau was therefore a heretic against the advance of history, outside the "pale of history" as Danto puts it, and for that he was disqualified.

The end of art that comes with the rise of postmodernism, the view that we no longer believe in metanarratives and that they are thus ineffectual, means that art must be understood independently of any metanarrative. At this point in time all styles are available for the artist's use, but they will not have the same meaning. Any cubist work created now would not be a cubist work in a historical sense; it would be a post-art comment on that era of art. All art is now ironic

The most striking aspect of Danto's book is its reconsideration of the viability of substantive philosophy of history. Danto writes, "But in my first serious philosophical work, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, I argued that it was certain claims about the future which render what I there termed substantive philosophies of history illegitimate...Well, I must say that I am inclined today to take a more charitable view of substantive philosophies of history today than I would have done in 1965, when my book was written in the late stages of high positivism. But that is because it has seemed more and more plausible to me that there are objective historical structures—objective in the sense that, to use the example I just cited, there was no objective possibility that the works of which Motherwell's *Gauloises* collages later resembled could have fit into the historical structure to which those works of Motherwell

belonged, and no way in which the latter could have fit into the historical structures defined by pop. (Danto, 1997 43)

This is an astonishing admission, and in my view, is the clearest indication of a sea-change in scholars' attitude to metanarratives. The emphasis on historical structures is a welcome one, and Danto's presentation of them is largely on the mark:

The earlier historical structure defined a closed range of possibilities from which the possibilities of the latter structure were excluded. So it is as if the former structure were replaced by the latter structure—as if a range of possibilities opened up for which there had been no room in the earlier structure, and hence, again, as if there were a kind of discontinuity between the two structures, a discontinuity sufficiently abrupt that someone living through the change from one to the other might feel that a world—in our case the art world—had come to an end and another one begun (Danto, 1997 43-44).

In his attempt to postulate an end to art Danto, reviews his conception of the history of art and then notes its similarity to Hegel's framework for political history:

The master narrative of the history of art—in the West but by the end not in the West alone—is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes...It is quite striking that this tripartite periodization corresponds, almost uncannily, to Hegel's stupendous political narrative in which, first only one was free, then only some were free, then, finally, in his own era, everyone was free (Danto, 1997 47).

This analogy between his own theory and that of Hegel's philosophy of history is intriguing. Does this mean that after all the positivist era did to destroy the philosophy of history we now see the return of substantive philosophy of history? It is interesting that Danto felt compelled to give this testament of support to Hegel's most controversial work. When we get to Duchesne we will see that Hegel is a major influence on him as well. Danto's work (at least his philosophical work) is clearly narrativist. In fact it is metanarrativist. To posit an end to history or art is clearly to operate in a narrativist framework of stories with beginnings, middles and ends, and to posit a theory of the whole history art pretty much makes it a metanarrative. However, Danto jettisons the metanarrative in our own post-art era. So Danto is a metanarrativist who claims that metanarrative no longer functions to animate, guide or legitimate art. That is not as contradictory as it sounds. Danto's theory of art history as a whole can legitimately argue for a metanarrative while denying the applicability of metanarratives to the practice and criticism of art. Apparently living in a postmodern age that has lost faith in metanarratives does not prevent him from engaging in metanarrative.

The reason for Danto's use of metanarrative in the postmodern era of skepticism toward metanarrative lies in why I call the "narrative imperative." There is a deep-seated need to narrate our world, to make sense of it. Human beings organize their lives, even their selves, by constructing stories. History is the attempt to construct plausible stories describing and explaining the past. Acting in the world requires an

account of the world. Since we live in history, according to Ricouer (1990), Carr (1991) and Olafson (1979), we have no choice but to engage in narration or borrow existing narratives. Even postmodern art refers to narratives even though they are “little narratives”—narratives that situate the art, rather than full-blown metanarratives. But Danto also concedes that all the previous metanarratives are still in play and can be drawn upon by artists who wish to provide a context for their art. We now live in an “multinarrative” context according to Danto. However, Danto would deny that the metanarrative is functioning in the same way it functioned in Modernism. A metanarrative may supply “signposts” for understanding the artwork, but it cannot legitimate the artwork historically the way, say, Impressionism was legitimated historically by Modernist aesthetics because art history is complete. So although Danto argues in favor of the postmodernist understanding that art must now eschew legitimation in terms of Grand Narratives, he is still committed to an overall metanarrative to explain the history of art. But the multinarrativism of the postmodern era is not really new. Metanarratives are always sites of argument. All metanarratives are in constant argument with different interpretations of a given metanarrative, and they are also in conflict with competing metanarratives. The Christian metanarrative, for example, conflicts with the metanarrative of secular science as well as with different versions of the Christian narrative or the narratives of other religions. In fact, a narrative of the West that neglects these conflicts is a serious oversimplification of the history of the West. So while it is true that postmodernism brings with it a skepticism toward metanarratives, it also continues all the metanarrative arguments, at least in quotation marks. Thus Danto’s *End of Art* thus marks a return to metanarrative.

One further point about Danto’s metanarrative is in order. Several criticisms of Danto’s work (Carrier, 1998, and Steinbrenner, 1998, for example) have contested his metanarrative of art, particularly the primary claim that the era of art is over. In contesting Danto’s claim they are implicitly offering alternative metanarratives. These contradictory narratives have been in dialogue ever since, and it is the contest between these narratives that constitutes the multinarrative of art. The multinarrative’s claims are more limited than traditional metanarratives. The is no claim to any final truth or ultimate grounding to our interpretations or our actions. Postmodernism is correct on this point. Instead, we must choose between competing metanarratives, and even then, only provisionally. The great truth of the West is that the truth is always in abeyance. The great strength of the Western multinarrative has been its ability to keep the arguments going and to not stultify into compulsory interpretations dictated by a single master narrative.

Given the rejection of the traditional single metanarrative in art criticism, what place can there be for the canon of great works? Can a canon only function in the context of a single metanarrative? In my view, the notion of the canon is still viable even if we reject the single metanarratives that attested to the greatness of canonical works. We can still appreciate the canon as we open it to new works, even works of art in the post-art era. Modernist critiques of the canon already asked that we be more critical of the existing canon and that it be opened to works and artists previously excluded for whatever reason. This sort of critique did not require postmodernism. In

fact, we still need the canon to understand the history of art, especially the art that was made before the end of art. But we also need the canon to understand the art of the post-art era since these artworks will draw on the canon and the metanarratives of the past to situate their work. There is no view from nowhere after all. Yes, it is true that the canon and metanarratives can no longer legitimate artworks, but they are still necessary for historical understanding. We shall see that Gress and Duchesne also embrace metanarratives, so the three authors may be seen to establish at least a counter-tradition against the complete rejection of metanarrative.

II. Gress: *The Idea of the West and Its Opponents*

David Gress has written a book that attempts to reinterpret the “idea of the West,” an idea currently under great scrutiny in the culture wars. Rejecting the current understanding of the West, which is universalist, secular and idealist, Gress proposes a more contingent and realist definition that is less hostile to religion and the vicissitudes of power.

The key to the proper view of the West, in Gress’ view, lies in what he calls “the skeptical Enlightenment,” a liberalism that does not reject history, religion or human nature, but seeks the conditions of possibility of liberty and prosperity within those givens and not in abstract rights or visions of justice.” (Gress, 1998 xii) Gress is very clear that “Liberty grew because it served the interests of power” (Gress, 1998 1), not because of any telos of freedom or because of the inherent appeal of liberty. Gress, unlike Duchesne and Danto sees little value in the Hegelian dialectic. Gress argues that “The Grand Narrative,” which “rightly saw liberty as fundamental to the West...” also “mistakenly defined liberty as an abstract, philosophical principle, which it then traced through a series of great books and great ideas divorced from passions and politics back to classical Greece.”(Gress, 1998 1)

Gress argues that liberty is to be understood as a series of practices and institutions that evolved, not from Greece, but from the synthesis of classical, Christian, and Germanic culture that took shape from the fifth to the eighth centuries AD. The Western forms of the market, the state, the church, what Gress calls “Christian ethnicity,” were not possible without this synthesis and that this synthesis is the true origin of Western identity. For Gress, “What needs explaining is not liberty as a great idea sailing alongside history from the Greeks to modernity, but liberty as the tool and by-product that ultimately overshadowed its source, establishing the local and partial rights to property, security, and influence on government that enabled economic development and led to popular sovereignty and modern liberal democracy.” (Gress, 1998 2)

According to Gress, there are three great errors of the Grand Narrative’s understanding of the West:

1. The Grand Narrative incorrectly holds to a false dichotomy of abstract ideal of liberty versus messy and immoral history.
2. The Grand Narrative incorrectly upholds Universalism: that liberty and democracy are universally valid.

3. The Grand Narrative falls prey to an “Illusion of newness”: that liberty begins with the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions. (Gress, 1998 1-2)

Gress explains that these three errors show “why the conventional Grand Narrative and its ideology of centrist liberalism were always inadequate as accounts of Western identity and its history.” (Gress, 3) Gress sees the Grand Narrative as resting on what he calls “centrist liberalism” “on a humanitarian belief in social, moral, and economic progress growing out of the use of reason to define and solve problems,” and assumes “further that no problems, whether political, personal, or ethical, were ultimately insoluble.” (Gress, 1998 3) Gress also believes that “the canon of great books was selected to ground and confirm this bland but pleasant teaching.” (Gress, 1998 3)

Oddly enough, Gress’ position puts him in strange company. Gress believes “that the chanting students, the Bernalis, and the Sales were right to attack the liberal idea of the West, but for the wrong reasons. The Grand Narrative’s idea of the West fell to history because it forgot history. It was, as the critics maintained, inadequate, but not because it was exclusive, chauvinistic, or politically incorrect. It was inadequate because it defined the West as modernity and its core, liberty, as an abstract principle derived from the Greeks and transported, outside time, to its modern resurrection in the Enlightenment and its twentieth-century liberal American democracy” (Gress, 1998 7).

Instead of the march of Western Reason through history via great books, Gress presents the West as the institutional and political outcome of various critical conflicts and interactions: “of Greece with Rome, of both with Christianity, of all three with the ideal of heroic freedom imported by the Germanic settlers of the former Roman Empire” (Gress, 1998 7). Gress does not trace these interactions in the elevated atmosphere of the great books. Rather, they are played out in a highly destructive atmosphere full of passion and cruelty. Democracy, capitalism and science arise out of the Germanic and Christian synthesis, but the synthesis also yielded “holy wars, black slavery in the New World, religious inquisitions, and economic exploitation.” (Gress, 1998 7)

One of Gress’ most interesting points, but one which is left largely undeveloped is his view that “The West was not a single story, but several stories, most of which neither began with Plato nor ended with Nato.” (Gress, 1998 16). The idea of what I call “multi-narrativism” that I referred to in the section on Danto is applicable here as well. An exploration of the idea of multinarrativism would show that Gress is attacking a straw man. There simply is no single story of the West. Much of the vitality of the West arises precisely from the fact that it is a conversation linking a series of arguments and stories that can be drawn upon as circumstances require. It is a storehouse of intellectual tools embodied in story and argument. This storehouse has served us well through the passion and cruelty that Gress is at pains to emphasize.

Interestingly enough, despite Gress’ criticisms of the great books tradition, Gress’ book is an extended reinterpretation of precisely that tradition, although he does try to fill out the tradition with the story of the role of power in influencing that

tradition. Thus Gress covers exactly the same ground that is generally covered in such courses: Greece, Rome, Christianity, the Germanic invasions, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, liberalism and totalitarianism. One question that must run through the mind of any of Gress' readers is the question of his antipathy to Greece. He points out that Greece's liberty was not the same as modern liberty, that its religion was very different, that they had no ethic of compassion, but none of this is a surprise to anyone who teaches the Greeks in Great Books courses. In my view, Gress simply misunderstands the Grand Narrative's treatment of Greece. No one ever said the Greeks agreed with modern liberalism. Rather, there is a *narrative thread* running from the Greeks to contemporary U.S. and Europe. There are innumerable differences between Greeks and moderns, but that doesn't mean the Greeks are not the beginning of a conversation that culminates with the modern West. Gress is thus positing a straw man that is all too easily knocked down.

Gress next turns to the idea of Rome, which he finds central to the formation of the idea of the West. This is in contrast to the Grand Narrative, which supposedly relegates Roman civilization to the status of inferior copy of that of Greece. According to Gress, "Both the idea of the West and that of Europe received their first formulations in the Roman Empire" (Gress, 1998 108). Gress then traces the contributions of Christianity and Germanic civilization to the modern ideas of democracy and capitalism. Gress' triad of Rome, Christianity and Germany form his notion of the "Old West," which he feels has been systematically underplayed in the Grand Narrative. The rest of the book traces the mistaken replacement of the "Old West" with the "New West" first articulated by people such as Voltaire and Rousseau. Gress then traces the alterations in the idea of the West as it comes under the influence of liberalism, totalitarianism and even environmentalism. There is much more to Gress' book, but we have sketched enough of the argument to substantiate my thesis. Gress' book is a clear example of narrative interpretation, and thus falls easily into my category of new narrative work in the philosophy of history. In my view, however, he misunderstands the nature of the Grand Narrative. It isn't a compilation of elements added sequentially without alteration. Instead, the Grand Narrative, or better yet, the multinarrative, is a conversation that discusses the issues that are central to the West and now, the whole world. That in turn tells us why the Grand Narrative is still useful. It keeps our students involved in the great conversation over the key issues of concern, old and new. We will see that this is the approach Duchesne makes. He traces the twisting, winding narrative through both Gress' Old and New Wests.

Gress is seemingly unaware of the changes in the Grand Narrative since its formulation in the early part of the century, nor is he up on how the Grand Narrative is actually taught in great books and history courses. People like Marx, Fanon, and others are very critical of their forerunners in the Grand Narrative, but they have become part of the Grand Narrative themselves. Even original members of the canon such as Plato are now read as much as critics of modern society (he was, after all, a communist) as founders of a tradition. This does not mean the new voices have been co-opted; rather, it means that their voices have been added to the great conversation. Indeed, from the beginning the Grand Narrative has really been more of a chronicle of

a set of arguments than a continuing articulation of an internally consistent idea of the West. To be fair to Gress, there are some who conceive of the Grand Narrative in the way he presents it, but I would argue that this understanding was by no means universal and that it is certainly not the understanding of most people who teach Great Books and Western Civilization.

Next, it should be noted that Gress completely ignores one key aspect of the Grand Narrative: the chronicle of great works and deeds. The Grand Narrative doesn't just tell us how we got to where we are, it tells us about those works and deeds that we have come to regard as great. In other words, Gress ignores the aesthetic dimension of the Grand Narrative and its function in the teaching of taste. Maybe this is why Gress is so puzzled by the inclusion of Greece in the idea of the West. He doesn't trace greatness, and so Greece's greatness is unimportant in the development of the idea of the West.

Finally, Gress makes no mention of the recent trend toward world history and a world canon. Although one might argue that this simply not his chosen subject, to do so would be to ignore a profound change in the teaching and understanding of history and the humanities. For good or ill, we are now living in a global culture. What happens in India, China, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere matters to Westerners. The reverse is becoming increasingly true as well. This has led to the construction of a world canon and an increase in the interest in world history. It is also reflected in the development of methodological perspectives that look beyond the West, such as World Systems theory, Macrosociology and Comparative Civilization. Indeed, proponents of these views argue that any more narrow perspective is inherently flawed. To give just a few examples, think of the work of Collins (1998), Sanderson (1999), Andre Gunder Frank (1998), and Immanuel Wallerstein (2004).

Gress would respond to such an argument by saying that I am ignoring the crucial function of the Grand Narrative in providing an identity for members of Western Civilization. The Grand Narrative is not simply a story of the West, it is an affirmation of Western identity. Gress' argument is therefore that we have misunderstood who we are. The response to this line of argument is that Western identity is not static; it is a work in progress. It is also a work of will. We decide who we are and who we will be. It is interesting that more and more we see Western scholars taking pains to avoid the provincialism of Eurocentrism and to the extent they are successful, they are becoming cosmopolitan. More and more people claim to be "citizens of the world." The internet and communications generally are serving to pull the world together in profoundly important ways. Any philosophy of history ignores this phenomenon at the peril of irrelevance.

III. Duchesne: *The Uniqueness of the West*

Ricardo Duchesne makes the boldest argument for a Grand Narrative. Duchesne argues that the best explanation for the rise of the West, the broadest question in all of historical study, is a narrative one that traces threads from early Indo-Europeans to the present. The question of why the West modernized and came to dominate Eastern civilizations is one that goes back to Hegel and Weber. The argument is still going

strong with three new entries into the debate in 2011. Niall Ferguson's *Civilization: the West and the Rest*, Ian Morris' *Why the West Rules...For Now* and Ricardo Duchesne's *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*, all address the issue of the rise of the West. Duchesne's argument is the most significant. His treatment is by far the most comprehensive and rigorous. It is also the most ambitious. It is a powerful defense of Weber's theory of the rise of the West. Duchesne develops the idealist side of Weber without neglecting the recent work in economic history that has been so crucial for our modern understanding of the world wide transition to modernity. Unlike most theorists of world history, he regards high culture more highly than other theorists of the rise of the West. Duchesne's theory is what Ian Morris calls a "long-term locked-in" theory of the rise of the West, which says that eventual Western dominance was inevitable, as opposed to the "short term accidental" theories of revisionists, who argue that Western dominance reflected short term conditions in the 19th century.

Duchesne believes he can defend the "Long-term locked-in" Weberian argument, and he draws on the full breadth of it, not just the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958). Duchesne utilizes the theoretical refinements of Weber provided by Wolfgang Schluchter (1985), Steven Kahlberg (1994) and Jurgen Habermas (1984) , so his Weber is an up-dated Weber. Duchesne is right to point beyond Weber's *Protestant Work Ethic* (1958) to his comparative studies of religion generally and the significance of the theory of rationalization. Duchesne's arguments are directed against the prevailing view that Weber's theory is outdated, too idealist, and falsified by better economic arguments that show that China was not so far behind Western countries until quite recently.

In recent years, the debate over the rise of the West has focused on economic history, with several works devoted to showing that the Weberian account is mistaken. These authors, who we will call the "revisionists," Andre Gunder Frank (1998), Ken Pomeranz (2000), Bin Wong (1997) and Felipe Fernandez-Armesto (1995), are just a few of the authors who found the Weberian account to be flawed. The general thrust of the arguments was that economic history trumps Weber's cultural arguments about the rise of the West and favors a reassessment of the state of Chinese economic, cultural and political development. The revisionist argument, or at least one of them, is that China was both more economically developed and scientifically sophisticated than the West for most of history, and that colonialism, historical accident and monumentally bad decisions by the Ming and Qing imperial courts enabled the West to become strong just as China became weak.

Duchesne argues that "accident" theories of the rise of the West miss the most important factors contributing to the rise of the West. Duchesne believes that the key to understanding the rise of the West lies in the particularly active and aggressive Indo-European core of freedom-loving aristocrats whose contentiousness leads to an emphasis on personal liberty in politics and religion, and also leads to an agonistic discourse in intellectual life, which leads to the development of science and the technological breakthroughs that pushed the West materially ahead of the East over time. Duchesne gives his whole narrative a Hegelian cast by arguing that Western intellectual history can be read as a complex story of the battle for recognition.

There is a deep connection between Duchesne's Hegelianism and his argument for an Indo-European origin of the Western ethos. Duchesne argues that Hegel's theory of the struggle for recognition is really a story about the Western mind rather than mind generally, and so he needs to show why the West is different from the East in giving rise to the aristocratic mindset that struggles so mightily toward recognition. One might well wonder about how the Indo-European root continued to have such a salutary effect on the West long after these ethnic origins were well-diluted by contact with other cultural influences. To this question he offers a more complex Nietzschean narrative that combines the Dionysian aspect of the Indo-European (IE) mindset with the Apollonian mindset of the Greeks, the legal framework of Rome, the inwardness of Christianity, the Protestant work ethic and periodic renewals of the Indo-Euro aggressiveness all with a theory of rationalization. For example, to mark the connection between Indo-European aggressiveness to Greek thought, Duchesne writes, "The ultimate basis of Greek civic and cultural life was the aristocratic ethos of individualism and competitive conflict which pervaded IE culture. Ionian literature was far from the world of the berserkers but it was nonetheless just as intensely competitive." (Duchesne, 2011) Duchesne therefore sees the Indo-European aggressiveness as the source of the agonistic nature of Greek philosophy. He follows the thread of this aggressive through the history of the main contributors of the Western mindset.

Duchesne's overall narrative is much more compelling than his argument for the continuing influence of Indo-European mindset. It does make sense to follow a narrative line from the Indo-European origins to Greece, to Rome, to Christianity, Protestantism etc in terms of a rationalization process that contains a Hegelian dialectic of recognition, but Duchesne invests too much in the Indo-European beginnings of the narrative. I agree that we can trace a narrative line of development from the ancient Greek philosophers to the present that can be understood as a Hegelian dialectic of progress. And with Duchesne, I think the Western mindset gave it a clear advantage in developing capitalism. For Duchesne, the Western advantage becomes clear sooner than I would suggest, but in any case, Duchesne and I agree that the advantage of the Western mindset was ultimately that it gives rise to an experimental science that looks for universal laws and a politics of personal liberty and representative institutions. At a certain point the progressiveness of Western science and liberty was bound to make itself felt in material well-being. It was just a matter of when.

Duchesne should have embraced Gress' synthetic and contingent model of the narrative of the West. Tracing the source of the Western ethos back to Indo-European spiritual restlessness is an extra step he need not have taken. The Western narrative was created over time and subject to historical contingency rather than the result of a locked-in essence in the nature of Western peoples or the working out of the Hegelian dialectic of freedom, although the Hegelian dialectic may also be an important part of the story of the West. The brilliance of ancient Greece did not inevitably lead to modern science, liberty and capitalism, and Duchesne realizes this, but he believes he can trace the genesis of all these key elements of the West back to the Indo-European ethos. In my view, Duchesne should have simply embraced the narrative as a whole.

The greatness of the West is no less great because it came about in at least partially contingent fashion. It was the long-term gathering of the ideas and practices that came to define the West that was crucial to its success, not its origins. It is the history of the West as a whole that we should appreciate, not simply its beginnings or its engine.

Duchesne is well aware that his theory is quite idealist. On the other hand, Duchesne would be the first to agree with Gress that the idea of the West and the accompanying Grand Narrative is more complex than a working out of foundational Greek ideas. Roman law and Germanic liberty are both granted their roles in the development of the Western narrative, so Duchesne's story is one that begins in the Greek mind, moves into the Roman mind, the Medieval Christian mind and becomes definitive for the rise of capitalism with the Protestant mind.

Duchesne situates his argument for Western uniqueness within a defense of Western culture against a multiculturalism that regards the Western canon as just one among several. The two arguments are distinct, and one can be in favor of an increased emphasis on the teaching of non-Western culture, especially Indian and Chinese, as I am, and still believe that the Western canon has unique value crucial to the education of students. The great virtue of Duchesne's argument is its breadth. Not since Habermas has a thinker mastered so many different academic literatures. This enables him to adequately characterize the rise of the West debate in its entirety. But this is what Duchesne is able to accomplish. Duchesne's review of the literature in economic history on the rise of the West is especially impressive. He mounts a powerful attack on the argument that China's economy was merely a victim of temporary weakness. Duchesne shows a strong connection between the ideas of the Western mind, particularly once they manifest themselves in modern science and politics, and Western economic performance. But Duchesne also argues that Western ideas, especially the ideas of objective science, liberty and the rule of law are worthwhile defending in themselves. (Duchesne, unlike Gress, has a deep appreciation for the canon of great works). So even if these ideas had yielded an inferior economic performance, they would still be worth defending. Duchesne, however, thinks that not only are Western ideas good in themselves, they also lead to good economic and political outcomes. Duchesne thus makes an excellent case for both the role of culture in historical explanation in his explanation of the economic and political outcomes that led to the rise of the West and for the teaching of the canon. Duchesne also opens up new lines of research, which is another mark of a good argument. After seeing the Western narrative so ably presented in Hegelian fashion, one is led to consider what comparable Indian and Chinese "Hegelian-esque" narratives one could write to properly create a full-fledged historical comparison.

Conclusion

The three works I have discussed show that in spite of the overall dominance of materialist explanation in history, cultural explanation has its defenders. Danto, Gress and Duchesne are not afraid of cultural interpretation that involves metanarratives. Metanarratives will always have a place in the study of history, especially cultural history. It is not surprising that these works have appeared at a time of increased self-

reflection caused by the end of the cold war and of the millennium and the development of a postmodern culture which seemingly resists narrative analysis. Human beings' quest for identity, understanding and meaning may wane at times, but it will always return, and with their return will come narratives. It is also not surprising that interpretation would show itself to be most necessary in the field of art, an area that tends to draw out its practitioners' feelings about themselves.

If we look at these thinkers together we arrive at a new conception of the nature and role of narrative and the canon. We should be aware of the need for a world canon. It simply is not adequate to present the Western narrative in isolation from the high culture of the rest of the world. Danto's embrace of the postmodern in art shows us that we need not commit to any single narrative even within a tradition. In fact, it shows the viability of multinarrativism, the view that we now view events through many lenses at the same time. While this may seem contradictory to the notion of a Grand Narrative, it need not be so. The Grand Narrative of the West has always consisted of several inconsistent threads. The Grand Narrative of the West is an on-going argument with several factions. The vitality of the Grand Narrative is precisely its agonistic nature. Following Gress, we see the need to be aware of external influences on the canon. The canon is not simply a working through of the logic of ideas. Ideas are subject to all kinds of mundane influences. Duchesne teaches us that parts of the canon are absolutely crucial to understanding the West and that we devalue the canon at our peril. Duchesne also teaches us to look at the Western canon as a long and continuous—if not always self-conscious, set of arguments about the nature of the world and the good life. The value of the elements of the Western narrative is not only their individual greatness; it is their contribution to an on-going set of arguments and stories that have proven valuable to the success of the West. The West is not just characterized by a belief in individualism, it is also characterized by the argument over the limits of individualism. Notice also that multinarrativism can handle the challenges of the modern feminist, leftist, ecological and other critiques. They are all essential elements of the Western Grand Narrative rather than its opponents. Both the Grand narrative and the Canon are viable if they are understood dialectically, as a set of competing arguments. As a "master" narrative, a single narrative that explains totalities, the history of art or the whole of history, the notion of Grand Narrative is no longer viable, but the dialectical multinarrative I have suggested may be an acceptable alternative and therefore a basis for further research and educational policy. Danto, Gress and Duchesne make a good case for Grand Narratives, and they allow us to see the way toward a new way of using Grand Narrative and the Canon.

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Dr. J. Randall Groves, Professor of Humanities. Ferris State University, MI 49307, USA. Email: grovesj@ferris.edu