

Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh,  
*Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be*  
Chapter Four: "The Don't Tell Stories Like They Used To"

1. What is the nature of narrative or how does narrative correspond to the four-worldview questions under consideration? 64

What's gone wrong: plot  
What's the remedy: resolution of conflict  
Who am I: character  
Where am I: setting

The biblical story or narrative of God's intent to redeem a fallen creation, to salvage a sin-wrecked creation, is the means by which the Bible answers the four questions.

2. What other religions use narrative? 64

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Judaism
- African religion
- Classical religions of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Mesopotamia

3. In what ways has modernity in the West been the exception to the narrative conception of morality? 65

The architects of modernity sought to establish a purely rational, objective, abstract, formulaic approach to morality that was independent of and unimpeded by the historically conditioned aspects of life.

Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative was the chief example.

Such a construction was necessary for the sake of modern progress.

Quotes from David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas, page 65.

4. How did modernity's version of morality differ from classical convictions of morality, especially Plato and Aristotle's? 65f

There is the Aristotelian distinction between *theoria* and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). *Theoria* could describe the way things are; *phronesis*

was intertwined with subjective, historical, contextual matters. Phronesis is the attempt to determine right and wrong in an ad hoc manner; which is dependent upon identity, social roles, beliefs, traditions, of the moral agent in common.

5. What has been the unique contribution of Alasdair MacIntyre and his book *After Virtue* (1981) on the matter of ethics and the notion of narrative? 66ff

The modernist project had to fail in its attempt to attain to an abstract, contentless, ethic.

This modernist notion itself was a socially condition product of the Enlightenment project itself.

That it itself is rooted in story and is a faith is revealed by that fact that the application of the canons of reason have not been able to agree upon moral issues.

Furthermore, there is no “tradition neutral rationality” available to us to decide moral issues. Hence the quest for such a rationality impedes even meaningful conversation about moral disagreements.

6. What does MacIntyre argue in the follow up book in 1988 *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 67f

That practical reason, phronesis, is also tradition bound, that there are intractable disagreements about the rational process and criteria governing our decisions about what justice is. Not only are conceptions of justice tradition bound, but reason itself is narrative dependent.

7. What, then, is MacIntyre’s basic point? 68

Summary on page 68

8. Is MacIntyre a postmodernist?

NO! He argues for a return to an Aristotelian/Thomist conception of morality.

He argues for a conception of morality within the context of narrative.

9. How does MacIntyre’s argument for narrative relate to worldview and the biblical worldview in particular? 68f

It enables Christians to understand the bible as narrative, not as abstract, theological principles!

10. What are the two levels of story that is found in MacIntyre and others? 69

LEVEL ONE: first order activity of socially embodied narrative

LEVEL TWO: grounding or legitimating narrative which guides the practice of a given narrative; second order activity associated with myth as a vision of and for life. Postmodernists part company with this second version.

11. But what's wrong with metanarratives according to postmodernists? 70

Two things:

1. One, they claim to know more than they can possibly know.
2. They lead to violence

12. What is the example of a hegemonic metanarrative as expressed in Francis Fukuyama's article "The End of History"? 71

It favors liberal democratic capitalist ideology over all others as the final form of human government and economics.

13. What is the postmodern answer to the world view question: What's the remedy?73f

Answer: get rid of metanarratives, master stories, over arching paradigms, etc. This leaves two options:

1. Only have local, little stories that allow every one's voice to be heard.
2. Reject even micronarratives and substitute for them, a la Friedrich
3. Nietzsche, aphorism, for the sake of calculated absence of systematic or narrative argument.

14. What are some examples in addition to Nietzsche of the aphoristic?

Norman O Brown: Theogony; Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History; Love's Body; Closing Time; audiotapes--"To Greet the Return of the Gods."

Gnostic gospels, esp. the gospel of Thomas, from Nag Hammadi, which is aphoristic in character, contrary to the canonical gospels which tell a story. Here see John Dominic Crossan's postmodern reading of Jesus under the heavy influence of the gospel of Thomas.: The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant, 1992.

Zen Buddhism's koans

## Taoism in the Tao te Ching and I Ching.

15. What agreement do Walsh and Middleton have with the postmodern critique of metanarratives? Where do they disagree and how do they criticize?

### AGREE:

1. The implication of metanarratives with violence.
2. The proliferation of little, local, micronarratives.
3. The need for Christian community to listen sympathetically and learn from these micronarratives.

### DISAGREE:

1. My own criticism is this: that metanarratives do not have to lead to violence. Take for example, the Christian metanarrative. Within it is this admonition: we don't not war or wrestle with flesh and blood; our struggle is against the principalities and powers; the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of forces. Also, our approach to spiritual warfare itself is to be without alarm (Phil. 1) and undertaken with respect for all men and women, recognizing who and what we are by grace (Titus 3).
2. Metanarratives do not have exclusive claims to totalization and thus to violence.

For example, the war in the **Balkan states** (held in check by the soviet metanarrative; also, we can't help but wonder if the metanarrative of the USA, it's cultural authority derived from republican and democratic political ideals and the Judeo-Christian religion, if it fails as did soviet communism, could we have warfare here too? See James Davison Hunter, Before the Shooting Starts)

- Zulus and ANC, and intra Zulu tribal war.
- Rwanda
- Israel and PLO
- Northern Ireland

In other words, local narratives can legitimate violence just as much as metanarratives.

3. Could violence also be done in the name of the postmodern narrative? It too is a metanarrative for which one, presumably, would do violence, at least verbally. Postmodernity is an

unrecognized, unacknowledged master story. Postmodernists denounce metanarratives by appealing to their own.

16. How do gangs with their violence testify to the residual need for metanarratives? 77

There is the need to belong to a group, to inhabit a meaningful story, even a narrow and violent one.

17. How does the film *Blade Runner* illustrate the postmodern condition?

Replicants, because they have no history or no story, are like postmoderns who have neither of the same. Hence, both act out of this sense of destitution or anomie with violence and brutality.

Postmodernity while calling into question all other narratives does not have the resources of its own to empower people to live with integrity and hope. One on the postmodern table couldn't fight oppression, even women, since there is no coherent way of appealing to right and wrong.

18. What are Walsh and Middleton's concluding questions and criticisms of postmodernism? 78

they question whether or not metanarratives are at the root of the problem, and whether radical plurality and the free play of difference is the answer.

Like the recurring term *pharmakon* (drug) in Plato's *Phaedrus* in its reference to writing, it is both good and bad, simultaneously both beneficial and evil.

So, too, are metanarratives. They are pharmacological, both remedy and poison, depending on how they are held, used or abused.

But the ultimate problem is the violence in the human heart, which goes way beyond any solution provided by postmodernism.