

# NARRATIVE (叙事) AND THE RUSSIA- UKRAINE WAR

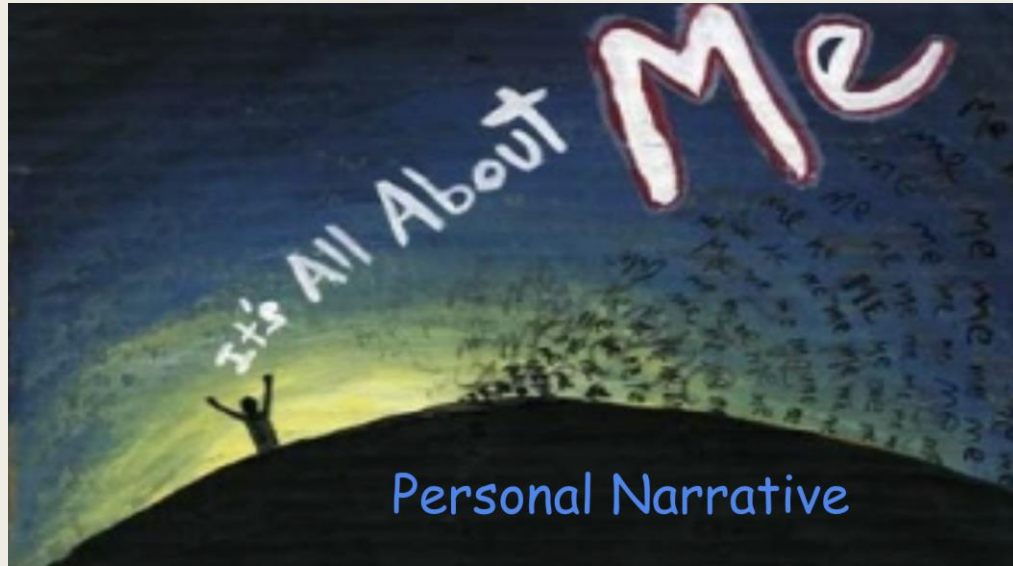
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# Lecture outline

- Historical and philosophical background
- The importance of narrative
- Narrative and the Russia-Ukraine war
- Personal reflections & opinion

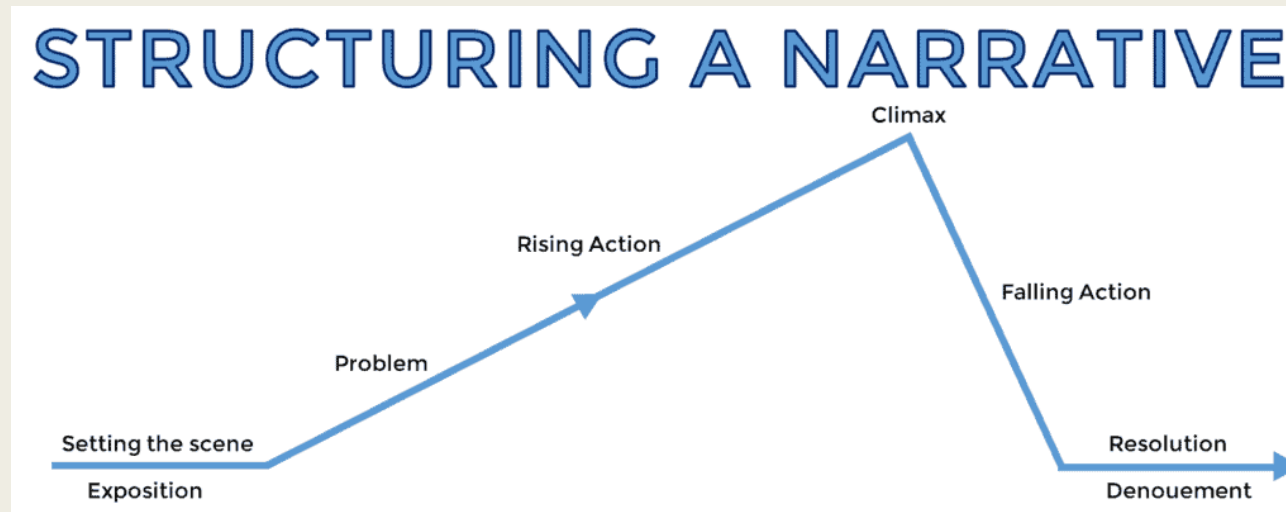
# What is a narrative?



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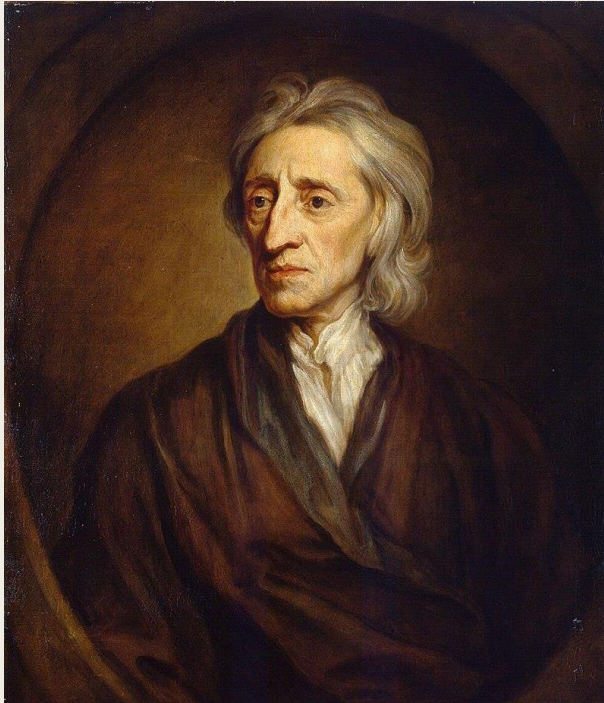
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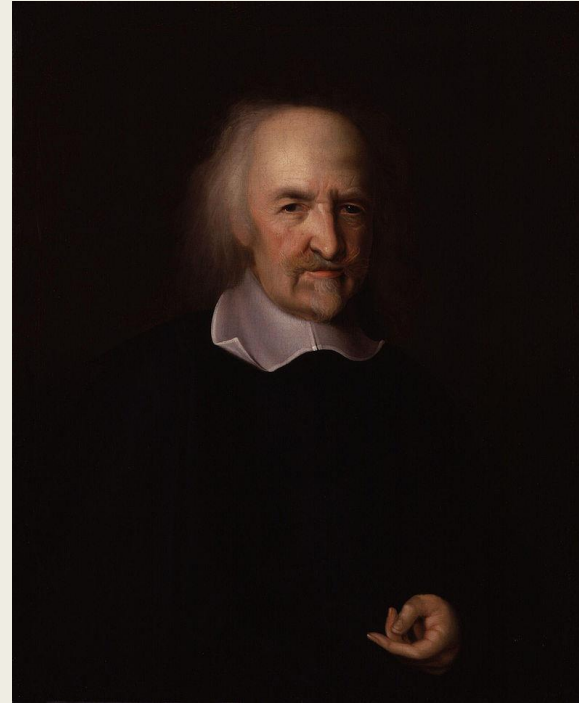
# Key empiricists



Francis Bacon  
Credit: Wikimedia



John Locke  
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Thomas Hobbes  
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David Hume  
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# Key rationalists



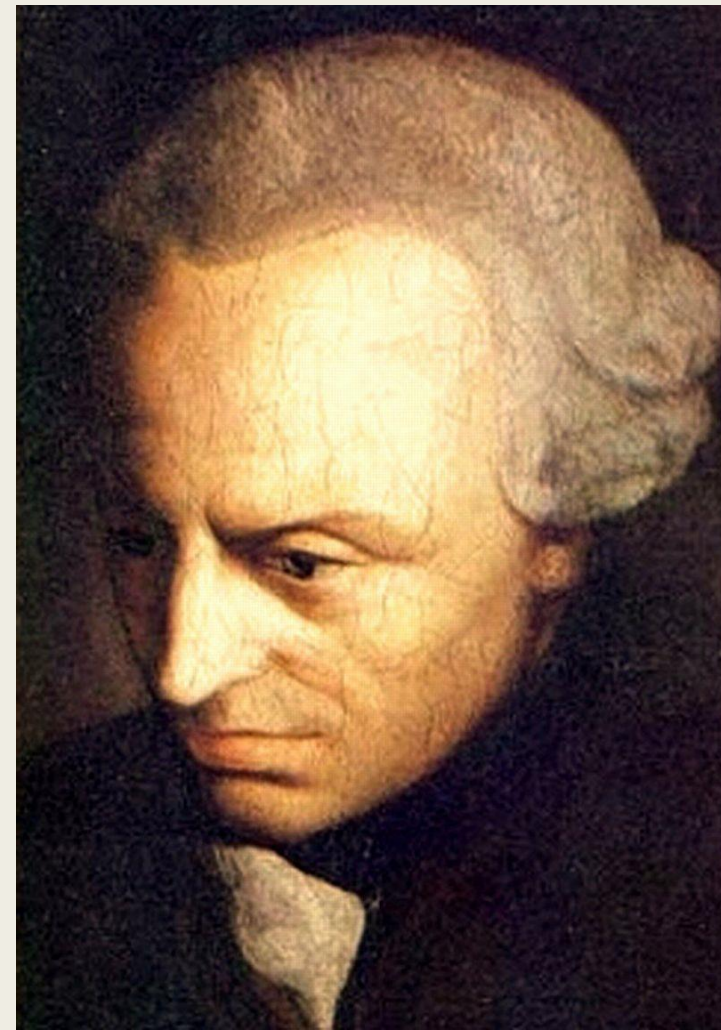
Rene Descartes  
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Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz  
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Christian Wolff  
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Immanuel Kant

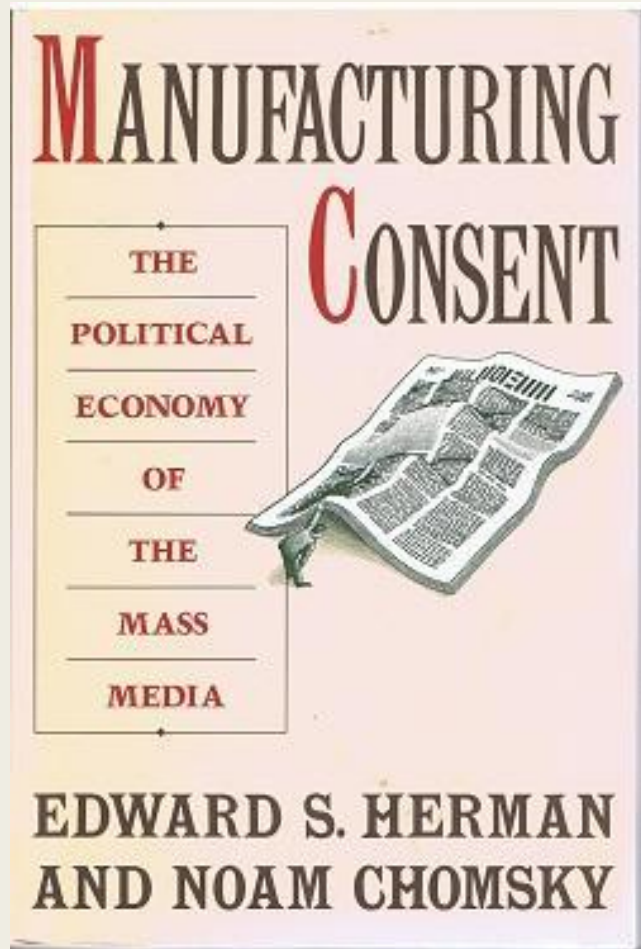
Credit: Wikimedia

It is not the external world that defines our experience; rather, fundamental conditions of human cognition makes the world comprehensible and experience possible

# The importance of narrative

- There is no so-called unmediated/objective reality. Reality and facts about it are necessarily mediated by the conditions of our cognition
- In order to be comprehensible, the facts about the world have to be synthesized into a coherent whole, hence the importance of narrative
- Different people interpret the same set of facts differently not only because of some a priori differences in their comprehension capabilities, but also because of different interests and priorities
- Difference in interests creates a room for deliberate manipulation of narrative (i.e. story about some facts of the world), thus creating additional artificial layers of mediation between us and reality



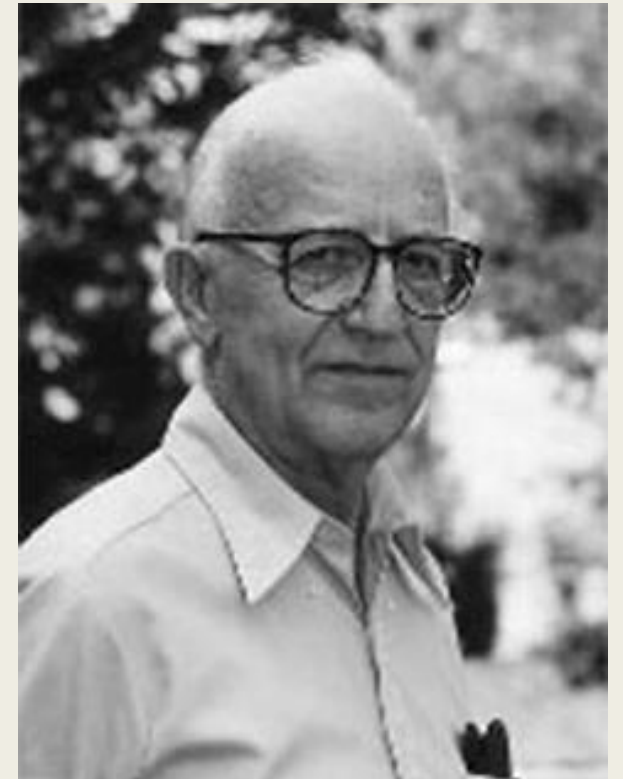


Credit: Wikimedia



Noam Chomsky

Credit: Wikimedia



Edward S. Herman

Credit: <https://tantor.com/>

# Narrative and the Russia-Ukraine war

## ■ Horizontal “filters”

Geopolitical  
competition

Economic  
competition

System of  
values

Leadership’s  
image

## ■ Vertical “turning points”

1. 1999: the first round of NATO expansion and the war against Yugoslavia
2. 2003: US invasion of Iraq and one of the first color revolutions on the post-Soviet space – the “Rose revolution” in Georgia; Russia’s authoritarian turn
3. 2004: the second round of NATO expansion and the “Orange revolution” in Ukraine
4. 2008: Russo-Georgian war
5. 2010-2011: the Arab Spring and the subsequent bombings of Libya by NATO
6. 2012: Civil War in Syria and Putin’s return to Kremlin
7. 2014: Coup/revolution in Ukraine and the subsequent crisis

# Two opposing narratives

## Key points in Russia's narrative about the West:

- The West deceived Russia and betrayed its own commitments about NATO's non-expansion
- Color revolutions in the countries of the former Soviet Union ignited by the West further proved to Russia the real intent behind Western actions – weakening and possible destruction of Russia
- Western actions showed its denial of any legitimacy of Russia's security and economic interests
- The so-called “rules-based international order” is a disguise for American hegemony
- In Ukraine Russia is defending its legitimate interests. If it's not done, the West will do everything to defeat Russia

## Key points in the West's narrative about Russia:

- After the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia made promising steps toward democratization and liberalization
- However, starting with Putin Russia began to increasingly diverge from the democratic path and once again took on an authoritarian turn
- With every year Russia was getting more and more aggressive when finally in 2008 it attacked Georgia and showed its true intent – conquer its neighbors and build a new empire
- In 2012 Putin returned to power after carefully changing the Constitution, and Russia had completed its authoritarian turn
- In Ukraine the West is defending democracy and sovereignty of the Eastern European states. If it's not done, authoritarianism will defeat democracy elsewhere in the world, and the East Europeans will fall prey to Russia's imperialism

# Personal reflections

- I condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Already in February 2022 I signed an open letter written by Russian scientists and academics calling for the immediate end to Russia's invasion

## Открытое письмо российских ученых и научных журналистов против войны с Украиной

Мы, российские ученые и научные журналисты, заявляем решительный протест против военных действий, начатых вооружёнными силами нашей страны на территории Украины. Этот фатальный шаг ведёт к огромным человеческим жертвам и подрывает основы сложившейся системы международной безопасности. Ответственность за развязывание новой войны в Европе целиком лежит на России.

Для этой войны нет никаких разумных оправданий. Попытки использовать ситуацию в Донбассе как повод для развёртывания военной операции не вызывают никакого доверия. Совершенно очевидно, что Украина не представляет угрозы для безопасности нашей страны. Война против неё несправедлива и откровенно бессмысленна.

Украина была и остаётся близкой нам страной. У многих из нас в Украине живут родственники, друзья и коллеги по научной работе. Наши отцы, деды и прадеды вместе воевали против нацизма. Развязывание войны ради геополитических амбиций руководства РФ, движимого сомнительными историческими фантазиями, есть циничное предательство их памяти.

Мы уважаем украинскую государственность, которая держится на реально работающих демократических институтах. Мы с пониманием относимся к европейскому выбору наших соседей. Мы убеждены в том, что все проблемы в отношениях между нашими странами могут быть решены мирным путём.

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# Personal reflections

- I believe all parties involved in the war bare responsibility for it (the Russian government, the Western governments, and the Ukrainian government). Russia illegally invaded a sovereign country. But Russia was deliberately provoked by (primarily) the US and other Western countries. The Ukrainian government's responsibility lies in its disregard for the Minsk II agreement, and in its inability to mediate between the West and Russia
- It is hard to see a solution to this war any time soon. The only way to proceed and to guarantee the survival of the human species is through diplomacy and negotiations. In the nuclear age, unjust peace is better than the just war

“ABOVE ALL, WHILE DEFENDING OUR OWN VITAL INTERESTS, NUCLEAR POWERS MUST AVERT THOSE CONFRONTATIONS WHICH BRING AN ADVERSARY TO A CHOICE OF EITHER A HUMILIATING RETREAT OR A NUCLEAR WAR. TO ADOPT THAT KIND OF COURSE IN THE NUCLEAR AGE WOULD BE EVIDENCE ONLY OF THE BANKRUPTCY OF OUR POLICY--OR OF A COLLECTIVE DEATH-WISH FOR THE WORLD.”

*John F. Kennedy, Commencement Address at  
American University, Washington, D.C., June 10, 1963*