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The Moral Importance of Narrative: A Philosophical Analysis of Narrative Transport

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

by

Christopher J. McVey

June 2020

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Committee Chairperson

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Acknowledgments

This is a project that I didn't think I would finish. For years, I had resigned myself to never completing this dissertation, taking solace in the fact that with or without the actual diploma I had extracted the benefits I originally sought from a graduate education. Although I still believe that to be true, I can now say that finishing this dissertation was the right decision and something that I will forever be tremendously proud of.

Above all, I need to thank my dissertation chair Eric Schwitzgebel. The debt of gratitude I owe this man cannot be overstated. Not only did his work initially inspire much of the content of this dissertation, but his unwavering support, both academic and personal, throughout the duration of my graduate studies was above and beyond what should be expected from any advisor. This dissertation would 100% not exist without Eric, and for that I will forever be grateful.

I would also like to thank Will Dunlop and Myisha Cherry for being willing to fill out my committee and help me finish this dissertation under very tight time constraints. Thanks also to those who helped serve on past committees in my graduate career, chief among them Agnieszka Jaworska, John Fischer, Coleen Macnamara, Adam Harmer, and Jozef Müller. A heartfelt thank you also goes out to The Life You Can Save foundation for providing funding for my empirical studies.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Moral Importance of Narrative: A Philosophical Analysis of Narrative Transport

by

Christopher J. McVey

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Philosophy
University of California, Riverside, June 2020
Dr. Eric Schwitzgebel, Chairperson

From novels to films to tall tales told around the campfire, stories are as important as they are powerful. Well-told narratives have the ability to whisk us away to far away lands, showing us interesting people and ways of life that we may not have been able to ever imagine on our own. But the experience of being mentally transported by an engrossing narrative is more than just a vehicle for escapism and entertainment, it can bring about very real and important psychological changes.

In Chapter 1, I begin by delving into Martha Nussbaum's views on the importance of narrative, particularly novels, for the cultivation of what she calls the literary imagination, something she believes aids in the cultivation of ethical and political theories that allow us to thrive in democratic societies. In Chapter 2, I connect Nussbaum's theoretical views with the empirical research on a phenomenon called

narrative transport and argue that it is the mechanism responsible for narrative impact

theorized by Nussbaum. Chapter 3 lays out a series of three empirical studies meant to

add to the literature in Chapter 2 and expand it to include the impact of narrative on

specifically moral beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior. Finally, Chapter 4

investigates the potential ethical issues surrounding the use of narrative transport to

intentionally sway the mental states and behavior of others.

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Chapter One

Nussbaum and the Importance of Stories

True, This! —

Beneath the rule of men entirely great

The pen is mightier than the sword. Behold

The arch-enchanters wand! — itself is nothing! —

But taking sorcery from the master-hand

To paralyse the Cæsars, and to strike

The loud earth breathless! — Take away the sword —

States can be saved without it[1]

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy

My Personal Journey with Narrative

For as long as I can remember, I've always been fascinated by and drawn to stories. Whether it was the poems and animations of Shel Silverstein or the cartoons of Walt Disney, I fell in love with the way vividly told stories would captivate my mind

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[1]Bulwer-Lytton, Edward. Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy: A Play in Five Acts (second ed.). London. 1839.

and carry it away to new and exciting lands. As I got a little older, I began transitioning

to the classic tales told by Jules Verne, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain, but I also

began exploring the works of more modern writers. In fact, one of my clearest

childhood memories was taking part in a middle school "read-a-thon" competition and

bringing John Grisham's newest novel *The Client* with me to class. My teacher instantly

looked worried and sent a note home to my parents asking if they thought it was

appropriate for a 10-year-old to be reading such a gritty and dark legal thriller. However,

my parents always gave me complete freedom in the stories they allowed me to read.[2]

It wasn't long after this that I discovered that film could also satisfy my desire for

mental escapism. While walking through a supermarket with my mother, I noticed the

cover of a magazine that advertised the upcoming movie *Jurassic Park* by Steven

Spielberg. I had actually read the book by Michael Crichton just the year before, and the

prospect of seeing the dinosaur-infested world of Isla Nublar brought to life on the big

screen was enough to make me beg my mother to take me to the theatre.

I was blown away. The manner in which Spielberg managed to take the images in

my head and make them a reality was amazing to me. Plus, there was a degree of

community associated with watching a film that felt more real than with books. Instead

of trying to convey to others the images my own brain had conjured just for me during

the reading of a book, the film offered a common point of reference from which to

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[2] It's hard to know whether this was for better or for worse. Is too much heaviness bad for a young brain? I just don't know.

embark on discussion. Somehow, the film *Jurassic Park* managed to spark more

amazement and discussion amongst my friends who had read the book than the book

itself had. There was something engaging and communal about film, and it had only just

begun to sink its teeth into me.

Soon, I found myself renting every Spielberg film I could find at the local movie

rental store.[3] E.T., Indiana Jones, Jaws, and Close Encounters of the Third Kind each gave

me an appreciation for this newly discovered medium. Naturally, I began seeking out

other directors, and over the next few years would come to find that the films of Ingmar

Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu, and Krysztof Kieslowski particularly spoke to

me. Not only did they weave beautiful tales, but they were often stories from cultures

and locations that I was unfamiliar with, giving me a unique glimpse into ways of life

that I had never encountered. Stories slowly became less a way to avoid the world and

more of a way to learn more about it.

Five years after Jurassic Park helped me see the potential of film, another

experience would help me see the potential in another medium. As a child of the 80s, I

was raised on video games. My first gaming console was the Atari 2600, with the

Nintendo Entertainment System soon to follow. I devoured every game I could get my

hands on and although there were some role-playing games like Dragon Warrior that

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[3] Note for future generations: we used to rent physical copies of movies, take them home, watch them, and then bring them back to the brick-and-mortar store. Crazy, I know.

told modest stories, I was never sucked into a video game narrative the way I was with books or film.[4]

That all changed in 1997 with the release of the game Final Fantasy VII on Sony's PlayStation console. The move from cartridge-based games to CD-ROM allowed game developers to make games more expansive and with cinematic cutscenes and music. Never had I played a game that felt so epic in scale, so rich with fleshed-out characters, and so rife with narrative depth. It's a cliché to say this in the gaming community, but Final Fantasy VII was the first game that truly made me cry, and not from something as trivial as a failed mission or lost saved game. No, this game developed a story so engrossing that the loss of a particular main character hit home on a personal level. Somehow, Final Fantasy VII, for myself and many others, had crossed the line from mere video game to narrative work of art.

In all of these cases, be it a video game, a film, or a novel, the stories presented did more than merely entertain. Rather, they provided something deeper, something more valuable, something profoundly human. They allowed me to get outside of my own mind, to think about the world from a different perspective. In some cases, the stories gave me a glimpse of humanity that I was cutoff from and helped me see the

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[4] Why I never felt the narrative pull of these earlier games is something I think about quite often. Dragon Warrior and the original Final Fantasy were two games I played extensively that had long, winding stories arguably more complex and involved than those found in any book I had read, yet they never gripped me in the same way. Oddly, an early game that did come close to gripping me with narrative was the side-scrolling game Ninja Gaiden released in 1989. It was one of the first games to utilize cutscenes and those scenes, together with compelling accompanying music, really drove the story home. Perhaps it is the emotional pull of the scenes paired with music that did the trick.

world, if only partially and imperfectly, from the perspective of someone else. Even in cases where the main character is not human, as in many video games and science fiction novels, the story invited me to think about the presented situations from that being's perspective, to imagine their hopes, desires, fears, and struggles. When done right, narrative, regardless of the medium, has the ability to stimulate and inspire the imagination unlike anything else.

But this should come as no surprise to anyone. Stories seem to have been a part of human culture and communication since the beginning of recorded history and beyond. The Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc cave paintings in France, for example, are dated to between 35,000 and 30,000 years ago, and depict numerous animal scenes, many of which seem to tell a basic story. Of course, most religious texts take the form of parable and aim to convey their lessons through the use of narrative. In fact, the oldest surviving piece of written work, the Sumerian Kesh Temple Hymn, dates from 2600 BCE and relates a sort of creation myth. But even more recognizable texts like the Holy Bible and the Koran largely take on a narrative form. In the modern world, global box office figures hit $42.5 billion in 2019, with book sales topping $25.8 million in 2018. No matter how you look at it, stories matter to people, and it seems to be one of the clearest cultural connections we have to our ancient past as a species.

Despite the ubiquity of stories in our lives, the power of narrative still holds a sort of mystical quality. That narratives are important to humans culturally and valuable tools in teaching moral lessons strikes everyone I've spoken to on the topic as obvious

and barely worth stating, but when pressed to explain why narrative holds this esteemed position or how it achieves its hold on us, most are left scratching their heads. It's almost as if the puzzle of narrative's hold on us has been hiding in plain sight. The ever-present nature of narrative's power has obscured the deeper questions within: How does narrative grip us? What impact does the consumption of narrative have on us? What value might narrative bring to our lives? What might be missing in a life devoid of narrative?

These are the sorts of questions I aim to begin investigating in this chapter. I'm of the belief that there are things that cannot be learned through logic, things that cannot be conveyed from one person to another through the use of premises, axioms, and conclusions. What's more, I think there are certain things that are better suited to the world of narrative than the world of logic and argumentation.

In what follows, I will layout Martha Nussbaum's view that the consumption of narratives, particularly in the form of novels, is crucial for the creation of thriving participants in a democratic society. In particular, I will focus on the idea that the form of narrative, independent of content, plays an important role in narrative's transformative power. With Nussbaum's view in place, I will then explore what I see as a potential problem with her view, that the reading of at least some types of novels may not have the beneficial effects she imagines. From there, I will layout my own view, that the form of narrative itself aids in the cultivation of a set of abilities I call the Literary

Theory of Mind and that the content of narratives directs how that set of abilities are employed in the world.

Narrative's Impact on Society

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates describes the manner in which the future guardians of his theoretical, utopian city should be raised. As would be expected for the cultivation of those who will become the equivalent of soldiers and police officers, Socrates lays out a rigid program of diet and physical activity that aims to create guardians of unwavering physical prowess. Surprisingly, however, the discussion of the guardians' physical training only comes after a much lengthier discussion of the education the guardians will receive through the study of music and poetry. What's more, Socrates's approach to this discussion makes it seem as though he is more concerned with *shielding* the guardians from certain types of poetry and music and less with specifically what they should be exposed to. These sections of *Republic* have notoriously resulted in many papers being published on Plato's supposed support of censorship in the ideal society.

Whether Plato actually was in favor of banishing the poets from Athens is not why I bring this up. Instead, I am interested in the underlying premise under which his

line of inquiry rests, namely, that poetry and music can have a profound impact on the sorts of people we become. This may be an obvious point, but one that seems to largely go by unremarkably. The only reason Plato could have for dedicating such a large amount of space to the topic of censoring certain stories and songs from a guardian's education is that Plato thought that stories and songs have some sort of an influence on what we believe and how we behave. In fact, every government or group in the history of human kind that has burned books, limited access to the internet, or banned genres of music has operated under the same basic belief: what we read and what we listen to has the power to sway our minds and inspire us to action.

In *Poetic Justice*, Martha Nussbaum embraces this transformative picture of stories and argues that narrative, and novels in particular, should have a prominent place in the education of all participants of a democratic society.[5] Her concern, broadly construed, is that for democratic society to function well, for it to properly take into account the lives of its citizens during the creation of institutions, laws, and policies, requires that the individuals who compose that society posses a particular sort of skill. This skill, which Nussbaum refers to as the "literary imagination," grants us an assortment of abilities that, when employed properly, result in what I describe as a deep

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[5] Nussbaum concedes that her arguments may apply to other literary works than novels, but she maintains that certain aspects of the novel make it the paradigmatic candidate for the cultivation of the literary imagination. I am inclined to disagree, and believe that other forms of narrative, including film, various types of performative arts, video games, and perhaps even music, are also capable of cultivating the literary imagination. For my purposes, when I refer to narrative I am referring to this larger category that includes all of the previously mentioned mediums more.

and profound recognition of humanity itself. This recognition leads members of a

democratic society to not only find a deeper satisfaction in their own lives, but to

structure society in such a way as to institutionalize that very recognition. It is only when

this recognition of humanity informs a public reasoning that emanates from the highest

office to each individual citizen that a democratic society can achieve its true ideals.

In my estimation, such a public reasoning has never been more needed. As I

write, in the early months of 2020, a national debate is ongoing in the United States,

one that, in many ways, showcases the very issues that Nussbaum is concerned with in

her writings. On the one side, there is a tendency towards cold rationality, the reduction

of lives to mere numbers or single facts: immigrant or non-immigrant, republican or

democrat, employed or unemployed, real American or enemy. The other tends towards

a more wholistic view, considering more than the basic facts on paper. And to be clear,

this is not meant as an exclusive indictment of one political party over the other.

Although one side arguably tends towards cold calculus more than the other, both sides

are imminently guilty, and the debate is just as alive within each party as it is between

them.[6]

Although she admits that literature alone cannot solve the many problems found

in modern democratic life, Nussbaum vehemently argues that the cultivation of literary

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[6] I wrote this section just a month or so before the global health crisis caused by COVID-19 struck the United States and drastically altered the course of life for millions. It strikes me that what I wrote here is even more true and pressing now under the current crisis. I can't help but point out and wonder about a president who has publicly admitted he doesn't read valuing numbers on the Dow Jones over potential human lives. In my opinion, our leadership has never needed the literary imagination more.

imagination through the reading of novels is a crucial element in combating ways of

thought that are detrimental to a life lived harmoniously with other human beings. This

is due to two main claims she makes about the reading of novels. One, that "reading

novels provides insights that should play a role (though not as uncriticized foundations)

in the construction of adequate moral and political theories," and two, that reading

novels "develops moral capacities without which citizens will not succeed in making

reality out of the normative conclusions of any moral or political theory."[7] I will

primarily focus on unpacking the first claim.

Adequate Moral and Political Theories

To properly understand what Nussbaum considers an adequate moral or political

theory, we must first understand her views on human flourishing and social justice, as

the two are inexorably linked. Perhaps most influential to her views in this area has

been Nussbaum's development of the capabilities approach, a method of evaluating and

cross-culturally comparing quality of life and social justice put forward by her and

Amartya Sen.

Historically, countries and researchers interested in determining and comparing

the wellbeing of citizens have relied on either statistics meant to act as indicators of

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[7] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 12

how well-off a person or group is or subjective, self-reported assessments made by the citizens themselves. However, each of these methods of determining wellbeing comes with major drawbacks. Relying on statistics runs the risk of oversimplifying the complexities of wellbeing and missing the nuances and differences between large groups of people. For instance, relying on economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product, employment rates, or homelessness tell us something about the living conditions of at least some members of a society, but they struggle to pinpoint what the living conditions are like from a first-personal level. Two populations with similar numbers on each of these scales could yield wildly different qualitative experiences. What is the distribution of wealth? Are certain minority groups systemically discriminated against with regards to employment? What is being done for the homeless and how are they viewed societally? Answers to these sorts of questions might make a huge difference in how well off the people of these populations actually are.

In light of this, it might make sense to move to a more subjective approach to evaluating wellbeing, perhaps by relying on polling the citizens themselves to determine how well off they are. This, unfortunately, runs into its own set of problems. Although directly asking individuals about their wellbeing is a move in the right direction from the more data-driven approach mentioned above, we run headlong into the problem of "adaptive preferences." In order for a survey or poll to determine the wellbeing of a person, we must rely on their answers to questions about their happiness or whether

they are having their needs and desires met, but the person's perceived needs and

desires may have artificially adapted to their given set of conditions. Nussbaum argues

that individuals "adjust their desire to the way of life they know… Adaptive preferences

are formed without one's control or awareness, by a casual mechanism that isn't of

one's choosing."[8] In other words, people tend to adapt their desires, expectations, and

even self-perceived happiness to the realities of their situations.

   To avoid these issues and more, Nussbaum and Sen have created a system that

attempts to gauge and compare the wellbeing of people by straddling the line between

these two objective and subjective approaches. According to their capabilities approach,

the best way to determine the wellbeing of a population is to ask what each person,

individually, is able to actually do and become within her particular society.[9] This tactic

has the benefit of not boiling human wellbeing down to a single, measurable value or

dimension while also not relying on the self-reported satisfaction of individuals' desires.

Rather, it focuses on establishing objective categories, each filled-in with subjective,

culturally sensitive details, that ensure individuals are capable of living flourishing lives.

   There are many ways we could answer the question "what is this person able to

do, be, and become within her society?" For instance, we might answer that the person

is capable of living relatively disease-free due to adequate access to health care, or that

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[8] Martha Nussbaum. Women and Human Development, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, Pg 136-137.
[9] Nussbaum, Martha C. Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2011. Pg 18

she is capable of having enriching, emotional attachments to people in her community, or even that she is capable of engaging in leisure activities. The capabilities approach is a holistic approach to wellbeing that emphasizes human freedoms and interactions, rather than single-dimension statistics like gross domestic product.

It is helpful to see Nussbaum's list of ten capabilities in its entirety:

1. Life

2. Bodily health

3. Bodily integrity

4. Senses, imagination, and thought

5. Emotions

6. Practical reason

7. Affiliation

8. Other species

9. Play

10. Control over one's environment

The list is meant to capture most if not all aspects of what allows an individual "to pursue a dignified and minimally flourishing life," and contains many things we would expect to find on such a list. [10] Life, bodily health, and bodily integrity, for

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[10] Ibid. Pg 33

example, are all obvious inclusions. Combined with "affiliation" and "control over one's environment," which aim to ensure that individuals can peaceably assemble with whom they desire and have some basic security over one's possessions and surroundings, we have a picture that comes close to the basic rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness enshrined in the United States Declaration of Independence. The basic picture emerging is a familiar one: people should be able to live healthy, long lives in the basic manner they choose without undue restrictions or oppression from their governments.

However, among Nussbaum's list of ten central human capabilities are some inclusions that many might find surprising. Regardless of whether these capabilities should be included in an evaluation of wellbeing or not, their inclusion does give us valuable insight into understanding Nussbaum's general thinking about human flourishing. For instance, found amidst the more standard entries of life, bodily health, and bodily integrity she adds things like emotions, imagination, senses, and play. On the surface, it might seem out of place for humanitarian organizations like Oxfam and UNICEF to be concerned with the amount of laughter or imaginative thought found in a particular society, especially when these organizations are often faced with aiding individuals who are struggling to have their most basic bodily needs met. However, Nussbaum sees each of her ten capabilities as being constitutive of a worthwhile human life, each with intrinsic value. To remove any, even play or imagination, would be to remove something important to what makes a human life worth living.

For Nussbaum, wellbeing is something more than can be captured by economic indicators, something more than just whether someone has access to fresh water or gainful employment. Of course, those things are valuable and in fact necessary for the living of a flourishing life (or to have life at all), but there are multiple dimensions of a flourishing, human existence that are missed by simply aiming for these basic biological needs. That children and adults alike are able to engage in play and develop their imaginations and emotions might not be a high priority for humanitarian organizations, but the degree to which a population has these capabilities is certainly a factor in how well off those people are.

But the fact that each item in the capabilities approach might not have same priority doesn't eliminate the fact that we would be saddened to learn that a life was devoid of any of these individual capabilities. One advantage, and perhaps a mark in favor, of Nussbaum's capabilities approach is that it adequately captures the feeling of "tragic loss" that accompanies situations in which one or more of the capabilities must be sacrificed in order that a person or group of people survive at all.[11] Clearly, there are many areas of the world in which access to recreation and advanced educational materials must be at least temporarily sacrificed so that funds can be allocated to eradicating hunger or disease.[12] Although this is an understandable sacrifice, and most

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[11] Ibid. Pg 37

[12] This is, in fact, something many areas of the world, including the United States, are now facing with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many communities are having to forego play, education, and general social contact in order to secure health and safety. The feeling of loss that many in quarantine are experiencing is a testament to how important these capabilities are.

certainly the correct course of action, we can all agree that the decision to forego play

and education is a tragic one. Surely it would be best if these people could be provided

with both sustenance and the opportunity to experience joy, both the healthcare they

so desperately need and the chance to grow their imagination and thought. That we feel

the loss in having to tragically choose one over the other is a sign of our recognition that

what is being given up is something central to what it is to lead a flourishing, truly

human life.

The capabilities approach put forth by Nussbaum and Sen paints a picture of

what Nussbaum thinks a human life should include and helps set the backdrop from

which to better understand why she thinks literature, and particularly novels, are so

important. As is clear by the capabilities included on her list, Nussbaum believes a

proper human life is one not only secure in bodily health, integrity, and freedom, but

one also rife with a rich and fulfilling internal life. Such a life is one where the individual

is capable of think, imagine, and love in the ways he or she chooses. It's a life that

includes a deep connection with the external world, including relationships with others

as well as the environment and other species. It's a life that is truly human.

Pivoting back to Nussbaum's views on adequate moral and political theories, it's

helpful to compare the emerging picture with what she calls "utilitarian rational-choice

models."[13] It is important to note right off the bat that Nussbaum makes a distinction

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[13] Although I, and Nussbaum, use the term "rational-choice model", we do not have as
our target any actual philosophical rational-choice theory. Instead, we use this term as a

between the utilitarian rational-choice mentalities she believes are so common in the modern, industrial West, and the more classical versions of utilitarianism as put forth by philosophers like Bentham and Mill. Nussbaum's target here is not the holders of refined, intellectual forms of utilitarianism like Peter Singer or J.J.C. Smart, but rather the general way of thinking that unreflective citizens often use to make decisions, particularly in the Western world. In fact, Nussbaum insists that classical utilitarianism as a philosophical theory has as its core a notion that is very much championed by the capabilities approach, namely, that each person's happiness is equally valuable. Also, classical utilitarian views are normative in nature in that their aim is to prescribe behavior that will result in the maximizing of happiness for all those affected. Again, this is something that the capabilities approach can certainly support.

The crude utilitarian rational-choice type thinking unconsciously employed by many people[14], on the other hand, is not similarly normative in that the explicit aim of such ways of thinking is to explain and predict human behavior through an appeal to rationality rather than to prescribe moral behavior.[15] In this way, those employing crude utilitarian rational-choice types of thinking are engaging with the world more like

placeholder for the description of the general way unreflective, philosophical laymen tend to act in their day to day lives. This will become clearer as the paper progresses.
[14] This is admittedly an empirical claim I am making based largely on anecdotal evidence. I am unaware of any study that shows this directly. However, I do take the claim that many people employ unconscious utilitarian ration-choice thinking to be fairly self-evident. I will lay out examples below that hopefully reinforce this claim.
[15] Although this can be thought of as a type of normativity, I believe it is importantly different from the explicit normative nature of classical utilitarian views and should be pointed out.

robotic economists, crunching numbers in a cold, objective manner in order to understand and predict the world around them, much in the same way a stock broker might attempt to understand and predict the movement of the Dow Jones. Granted, an economist may, and often does, use the outputs of his calculations to recommend courses of action, but this requires an additional step. What the economist is ultimately concerned with, in this way of thinking, is to churn out, through removed calculation, outputs that merely explain or predict the world and human behavior. The sophisticated utilitarian may also be interested in predicting and understanding the world around her, but her ultimate aim is different in that she is more directly concerned with what she morally *ought* to do. The difference is subtle, but the different aims and methods of each style of thinking is important to note and will be illustrated further below.

It bears repeating and emphasizing here that the term "utilitarian ration-choice model" is a perhaps misleading term for a basic way of thought employed by people unconsciously and often unreflectively. It isn't a formal theory, as the name may lead one to believe, but rather a general approach to problem solving or a general outlook on the world that influences how people act within it. In this way, the term is more akin to a zeitgeist than an actual philosophical theory. It's a general feeling of how the individuals within a society view the external world and the people in it, a sort of mood or way of being in the world, to borrow a term from Martin Heidegger. Those gripped by a utilitarian ration-choice model of thinking are disposed to see the world around them

as to-be-used in a particular way, a way that Nussbaum finds problem with and one that might find its cure in the literary imagination.

Although utilitarian rational-choice models may come in a variety of forms, Nussbaum isolates four main elements that the most common all share.[16] The first is commensurability, or the tendency to see all values as being either directly measurable against one another using a single metric, or reducible to some more basic value that can then be used as a single metric of comparison. Another way to put this point is that such views only allow value to differ in terms of quantity and not quality. For example, consider a person trying to decide whether to stay home and cook for her partner or to go out to fancy meal at a restaurant. Certainly, many considerations would have to be taken into account in order to make such a decision. Perhaps the woman values the experience of preparing a meal from scratch using her own skill and sharing the product with a loved one. Perhaps she values a night out on the town and having someone else do the cooking for her, all while taking in the sights and sounds of a night on the town. Crude utilitarian rational-choice models boil these values to a single, commensurable element that can then be weighed to find the action that maximizes that element, thus labeling it as the rational choice. The values associated with the experience of cooking for a loved one and of going out on the town can only differ in the quantity of something they share that makes them valuable, and not in quality or of kind. To reduce

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[16] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 14

qualitatively different human experiences (or even human lives!) in such a way is to

seriously dilute the richness of human life and its experiences.

The second, and related, element that these views share is aggregation.

Utilitarian rational-choice models tend to pool information across human lives and lump

them into a single category to be calculated against a category of commensurable value.

This type of thinking is perhaps best seen in the classic trolly problem thought

experiment.[17] When asked whether one may flip the switch that will move the trolley

that would have killed five people to the track on which it will only kill one, most people

intuitively say "yes."[18] Clearly, the thinking behind this answer seems to be that, all

things being equal, one death is better than five deaths, and so the rational thing to do

is to bring about the situation in which 4 fewer people have to die. This makes perfect

sense and is not, I believe, a criticizable way of thinking given the way the thought

experiment is presented. No further information about the individuals is given about the

potential trolley victims other than that they are alive and if struck they will be dead.

With that being the only information to work with it is then natural to make a decision

based on that information alone.

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[17] Again, Nussbaum makes a distinction between classical and crude forms of
utilitarianism. Undoubtably, many forms of utilitarianism could avoid these unsavory
aspects of aggregation. However, I am presenting this cruder form of the trolley problem
both as a clear example of the point Nussbaum is trying to make, as well as an
illustration of where we may be going wrong in the classroom to be explored further
below.
[18] When presented with this scenario first. See Schwitzgebel, Eric, and Fiery Cushman,
"Philosophers' Biased Judgments Persist despite Training, Expertise and Reflection."
Cognition 141 (2015): 127-37 for order bias on trolley problem style thought
experiments.

However, the problem arises when we use this sort of aggregative thinking in real life situations where people are more than just stick figures on a white board who can only be alive or dead. When making decisions that affect large numbers of people, advocates of the utilitarian rational-choice models aggregate the interests of all those affected so as to determine the best course of action. However, this necessarily strips each individual aggregated of her uniqueness, what makes her distinct and identifiable as herself and no one else. In a sense, to aggregate in such a way is to strip a person of an important part of her humanity and to reduce her to a mere data point in a long stream of data points to be computed anonymously in the crude utilitarian rational-choice machine. The distinction between individuals begins to blur, and with it many important aspects of what makes us who we are.

The third element is a commitment to maximization. As has already been touched upon, utilitarian rational-choice models are only concerned with getting as much of the chosen metric of value as possible, whatever it may be. Why have five of something you want when you can have ten for the same cost? The harm of such a way of thinking is perhaps best exemplified by the "deals" offered at fast food restaurants throughout the Western World (and now, sadly, spreading throughout the rest of the world as well). Take McDonald's supersize option that was popular until phased out in 2004 as the perfect example. A large drink holding 32 ounces of soft drink sold for $1.55 at McDonald's in 2004, while the 42 ounce supersize option cost $1.79, a mere 24 cents

more.[19] Twenty four cents in exchange for nearly a third more of what it is you want seems like a tremendous bargain, and the crude sort of utilitarian thinking we have discussed would agree.

The problem, of course, is this commitment to an economic-style maximization ignores many other important aspects of the decision, such as how regular consumption of 42 ounces of soft drink might affect a person's health. According to the National Institute of Health, "food portions in America's restaurants have doubled or tripled over the last 20 years, a key factor that is contributing to a potentially devastating increase in obesity among children and adults."[20] Although the social issues involved are complicated, it seems likely that part of the explanation for the increase in portion size in the US is due to the prevalence of the sort of crude utilitarian thinking Nussbaum is worried about. The point is that to boil rationality down to a simple economic cost benefit analysis potentially misses out on important aspects and nuances of human life. More is not always better, be it with our calorie intake or with the more subtle ways we decide to structure the public world in which we all live.

The final element that most utilitarian rational-choice models share is their assumption that all human preferences are exogenous, or that our preferences are the byproduct of our own economic self-interest combined with the external factors of our environment and not indicative of any further inner psychological world. The oft

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[19] http://www.active.com/articles/impressed-by-the-demise-of-supersize-take-a-closer-look (2004)
[20] http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/news-events/matte1.htm (2013)

misattributed and mistranslated saying "let them eat cake" illustrates this idea well.[21] As

the story goes, when Marie Antoinette heard that her subjects were without bread and

starving, she looked around at the abundance of cake in her palace and suggested that

her subjects be given that instead. According to Nussbaum, utilitarian rational-choice

models take individuals' interests as merely given inputs for an economic formula.

Antoinette's cold, utilitarian method of thinking about her subjects' interests failed to

understand the complex inner lives they lived and how that complex life would lead to

their specific demands. Marie Antoinette saw her subjects' desire for food as a mere

product of self-interest combined with the lack of adequate sustenance, causing her to

suggest a solution that would suffice for the satisfaction of her own desires for food.

However, what she failed to take into account is that her subjects' hunger was not

merely the exogenous product of biology and situation, but also a criticism of the

extravagance and mismanagement of the monarchy. By only understanding human

interests as exogenous, as given by external factors and as mere inputs for calculations,

Antoinette failed to understand the inner lives of her subjects, and thus failed to

understand what the offer of cake, a symbol of extravagance, power, and affluence,

might mean to them.

From these four characteristics of utilitarian ration-choice models of thinking, we

can now see a clearer picture of what Nussbaum thinks an acceptable moral or political

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[21] The quote, often misattributed to Marie Antoinette, is actually found in the *Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. The mistranslation of "brioche" to "cake" misses the original intention of Rousseau but serves my purposes here quite well.

theory must accomplish. First, acceptable views must be able to account for the noncommensurability of valuable things. Second, they must be able to prioritize the particular over the aggregate. In other words, the view must always emphasize the value of the individual rather than any group that individual may be placed in. Third, it must be able to appreciate the complicated inner life of a human being, and appropriately differentiate it from a calculating, maximizing machine. And finally, acceptable moral and political views must be able to connect a person's interests with her unique hopes and fears that give her life, and her life alone, its meaning. Any view that incorporates these four elements will be able to appreciate the value of a human life in the appropriately holistic way that Nussbaum aims for.

Looking at these desiderata altogether, we can see a basic theme: all four characteristics discussed above emphasize the value of the individual, and in such a way as to appreciate the uniqueness and independence of that individual as being grounded in her own psychology and inner life. What's caustic about the crude utilitarian rational-choice models that Nussbaum targets is not necessarily that they lead policy makers to make decisions in which lives are weighed against each other, after all, any policy that does not benefit 100% of its affected population will have to make such difficult calls. Rather, the problem is in what the policy maker considers while weighing those lives. Those employing crude utilitarian ration-choice models will weigh lives against each other as lives simpliciter, lives that are interchangeable and mere inputs into a decision-making calculation. Acceptable moral and political theories, I take it, will be able to aid

in making decisions, even ones in which lives are weighed against one another, while maintaining and appreciating that the lives being weighed are uniquely valuable. Not only this, but they will understand that value as being grounded in the unique circumstances of that individual, including her unique psychology and inner life.

Here I am reminded of the work done by philosophers like Albert Borgmann and Charles Taylor who critique modernity and modern technology-based culture. Taylor, for example, identifies what he calls the three malaises of contemporary culture.[22] The first malaise is a turn towards a sort of self-centered individualism, the second is the primacy of instrumental reasoning, and the third is a feeling of powerlessness against a political system that has institutionalized the first two malaises and in doing so has limited the freedoms of its people.[23] What Taylor is attempting to capture, and what I think mirrors the concerns raised by Nussbaum about the prevalence of utilitarian ration-choice models of thinking, is that there is a general malaise associated with modern culture and that malaise is associated with a particular way of viewing the world. Nussbaum's four characteristics of modern ration-choice thinking are not unlike Taylor's three malaises of modern culture. Each collectively paints a picture of a society that tends towards a more cold and calculated way of seeing not only the world, but the people we live in that

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[22] Taylor, Charles, The **Ethics of Authenticity**. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991.
[23] Although the first malaise, a turn towards individualism, may appear on the face of it to run contrary to Nussbaum's claim that modern culture tends towards aggregation, on closer inspection it does not. Taylor argues that individualism both encourages people to look at the world in instrumental and aggregative ways as a means of satisfying their own desires, as well as encourages governments to see citizens as having exogenous interests that are interchangeable and aggregable.

world with, resulting in a failure to recognize others', and perhaps even our own, humanity.

Similarly, Borgmann warns of a modern tendency to yield what he calls regardless power, a situation that occurs when we "act on the basis of scientific insight by way of engineering or organization in order to procure a result regardless of the recalcitrance or variety of circumstances."[24] In other words, Borgmann worries that modern culture encourages us to act in such a way as to ignore the depth, complexity, and details of a situation, much like we do when we utilize utilitarian ration-choice models of thinking by emphasizing maximization and seeing individuals and their preferences as commensurable, aggregable, and exogenous.

When Nussbaum says that the reading of novels can provide insights that lead to the creation of adequate moral and political theories, what she has in mind is a novel's ability to aid in the creation of ways of thought that combat the all-too-common ways of thinking that lead many in modern culture to ignore the depth of life and humanity of others and see them and the world as mere cogs in a cold, calculating, utilitarian-like machine. I, like Taylor and Borgmann, feel the trend towards this worrying mentality in the world today. However, you don't need to agree that the world is in a state of moral decline to appreciate the value in creating and endorsing moral and political theories

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[24] Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2003. Pg. 88

that appreciate the complexity and complete humanity of other people. This is truly

what Nussbaum is aiming at in her first claim about the benefits of reading novels.

The Literary Imagination

With a clearer idea of what Nussbaum has in mind when she refers to "adequate

moral and political theory," we can now move into a discussion of how exactly she

thinks the reading of literary works aids in the construction of such theories.

Additionally, I'll attempt to explain Nussbaum's second claim, that reading literary works

develops the moral capacities required to realize the normative conclusions of these

moral and political theories.

Nussbaum argues that the consumption of narratives, and primarily the reading

of novels, creates within the reader what she calls a "literary imagination." As

Nussbaum puts it, the literary imagination is, at its core, a public imagination, or an

imagination that is utilized in one's deliberations on how to treat others within a

particular society and time. This ability goes beyond, say, simply imagining the vibrant

details of the strange, foreign characters and exotic locales portrayed in a fantasy novel.

Rather, it is the ability to imagine another person as living a particular life with all the

psychological depth and complexity that entails and living that life within a particular

context that influences and creates that person's hopes, dreams, and desires.[25] And even more than this, it is the "ability to imagine what it is like to live the life of another person who might, given changes in circumstance, be oneself or one of one's loved ones."[26] The literary imagination is an imagination that not only allows you to envision the lives of others, but does so in such a way as to make you appreciate what it may be like to actually be them.

Nussbaum's emphasis on the novel as the paradigmatic vehicle for the cultivation of the literary imagination is no coincidence. Although she begrudgingly admits that other narrative forms such as film and dance may be beneficial to their consumers in some ways, the novel stands above the rest due to particular aspects of its genre and form.[27] With regard to genre itself, Nussbaum contends that "the novel is a living form and in fact still the central morally serious yet popularly engaging fictional form of our culture."[28] By "living form," Nussbaum seems to mean that the novel, as a genre, continues to not only be produced on a large, accessible scale, but also that it grows and changes with changes within the societies the novels are produced. This

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[25] Although Nussbaum seems to intend "person" to be thought of strictly as human, I believe her arguments can be applied to any narrative that portrays a being with sufficient mental complexity as to allow for us to identify with them.

[26] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 5

[27] Nussbaum seems at least open to the idea that film could do something similar to novels, but she is reticent to say that it, or anything else, could do as much or as good a job as novels. As noted earlier, I disagree with her on this point and will continue to suggest that other forms of narrative can achieve similar results.

[28] Ibid. Pg 6

creates works in which characters and situations are presented that are relevant to the current deliberative obstacles we might face in our own lives as public individuals.

Relatedly, novels encourage the reader to compare the portrayed concrete characters and situations to her own general experiences and beliefs. For example, if a novel portrays the lives of factory workers in a third world country, the reader might begin to wonder about the general conditions of workers in her own country. Or she might begin to ask herself what sorts of conditions a worker *ought* to have and how that ideal differs from the concrete situations the workers in the novel face. In other words, the novel causes the reader to engage in a valuable style of ethical reasoning in which concrete instances are compared and contrasted to general concepts. This allows the reader to generalize while maintaining focus, and appreciation, of the concrete facts presented in the novel. The reader wonders about the concrete situation and what that means for her own situation and the situations of others in a way that avoids the myopic focus found in the utilitarian rational-choice models discussed above.

The inducement to wonder is one of the primary ways Nussbaum believes the novel cultivates the literary imagination. What's more, Nussbaum contends that the novel's very form, independent of any specific content, is sufficient for inducing wonder and consequently in creating the abilities associated with the literary imagination.

In general, when we think of stories we tend to think of their concrete, content-full elements: A specific character encounters specific obstacles and takes specific actions to obtain her specific goals. But to engage with and understand a novel at the

content level is to take for granted certain aspects of the novel's basic structure. First of all, a novel presents a story, and stories require characters. These characters, be them humanoid or not, must be presented to us in such a way that we may identify them as individuals set apart from other characters. On a basic level, this is usually accomplished through physical description. We as readers are made acquainted with the particular features that make that character unique, be it an aspect of his physical appearance, a manner of speaking or walking, or even the general air about him. In general, novels provide sufficient detail to allow us to imagine the characters that populate it, and to do so in a way that allows us to differentiate those characters and recognize them as being unique and distinct.

Similarly, the inner lives of a novel's characters are laid bare before us, rendering those characters identifiable and differentiable. Even in tales where characters are physically similar, we come to know their inner workings, and as such, what makes each separate and distinct from every other character.[29] We come to know characters' hopes and dreams, their fears and concerns, and their particular mannerisms of thought and contemplation, and this can be achieved even when the reader is not given the contents of a character's psychology explicitly. For example, in first person and third person limited narration styles the reader is only directly exposed to the inner psychological life

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[29] I have in mind here stories like Edwin Abbott's *Flat Land: A Romance of Many Dimensions,* in which there is nothing to physically differentiate the four-sided main character A Square from other squares, yet the portrayal of his inner life makes him extremely unique to the reader (and to others in his own world).

of one character. However, the reader is still left to wonder about the inner lives of the other distinct characters the main character encounters. We meet characters, see their actions, hear what they have to say, and speculate about the types of thoughts and inner lives those characters might have. Regardless of the concrete facts of a novel's characters, the very fact that novels involve characters at all requires readers to develop the ability to see those characters as distinctive, be it via physical or mental distinctness.

Wonder plays a larger role when we consider the second major formal feature of stories: plot. Not only do stories have characters, but those characters exist in a world in which things happen. Characters have desires and interests that they must fulfill, and they must take particular actions to overcome particular obstacles in order to achieve their goals. As with character itself, that a story necessarily includes struggles, setbacks, and triumphs makes the reader wonder about the inner lives of the characters involved, even independent of the actual content of the plot.

To illustrate, let us take one of Christopher Booker's seven basic plots, one that he refers to as "overcoming the monster," at its most basic level,[30] [31] Suppose that character C sets out to confront evil force E, with the result of C overcoming E. Even at

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[30] I suspect that there may be a connection between the limited number of basic plot archetypes and the impact that narrative has on us as consumers. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it may be that the seven basic plots (or whatever the number may be) correspond with the basic ways in which we engage with society and the world around us. Regardless, I believe the fact that there are a limited number of basic plots lends credibility to the idea that narrative plays a special role in our development as social beings.

[31] Booker, Christopher. *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. London: Continuum, 2004.

this most basic of non-content-laden levels, we immediately begin to wonder. Who is C? What could her motivations be for confronting E? Is she frightened, or is she confident that she will persevere? The mere mention of a narrative structure makes us wonder about the thoughts, hopes, desires, and fears of the characters involved. What's more, we begin making connections between the characters and ourselves. What exactly is E, and would I be able to muster the courage to confront it? Have I ever been in a situation where I cared so strongly about a cause that I was willing to put myself at risk to see it succeed? And, perhaps most importantly, we also wonder how this narrative could be applied to the real world around us. What is going through the minds of other real-life people who go up against great odds? Perhaps people who seemed foolish to me before are in fact also standing up against what they see as a great evil. How would that change my judgements of them?

It might be useful here to consider just how far we are able to abstract a story form from its content before it becomes unidentifiable as a story. Even in the example above, there is *some* content to the story that is being represented by the variables 'C' and 'E', we simply have yet to fill them in. Built into the way I set up the example is a variety of content or at least what we might call proto content. I explained that there is a character and that the character overcame some evil force, which are themselves the basic content building blocks of a narrative. But how seriously should we take Nussbaum's claim that the very form of narrative, independent of its content, is itself important to the impact it has on us?

At first, it's easy to think that Nussbaum's claim must not be that the form of a novel, independent of *any* content whatsoever, can cultivate the literary imagination. Wouldn't a story without any sort of content be incomprehensible? What would that even look like? One way to read the view that form is valuable independent of content is that Nussbaum is actually trying to say that the fact that stories have content at all, regardless of what that content actually is, is sufficient for cultivating the literary imagination within those who consume them. This seems plausible. On this view, it isn't so much the form qua form that is beneficial, but rather the fact that content is interchangeable. There must be *some* content, but the content itself doesn't matter. Seen in this way, Nussbaum's comments are more of a way of drawing attention to the fact that we could plug anything into a narrative form and it would have the same effect on a reader. It's a bit like referring to a donut hole's existence (form) without the surrounding donut in place (content). We can refer to the donut hole in relation to the donut, but once the donut is stripped away the donut hole ceases to exist. In other words, the donut hole, like narrative form, does not have an independent existence separate from the donut, the narrative's content.

This seems backed up by Nussbaum's views in her book *Love's Knowledge*, in which she explores the relationship between literature and philosophy. Throughout this work, Nussbaum argues that the way we express our ideas is as much, if not more, important than what we have to say, and in fact the way we express ourselves adds to and alters what it is we convey. As Nussbaum explains:

The telling itself—the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences,

vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader's sense of life—all of

this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what

does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life's relations and

connections.[32]

Form and content for Nussbaum are inexorably linked. The form does not exist

without the content, but neither does the content exist without form. The way we

express ideas changes the content of the idea expressed, necessarily. Form changes the

way an idea is received, whether that idea is packaged in a novel, a short story, a poem,

a painting, a joke, or any variation of these and other forms. It cues the receiver of the

communication, either overtly or unconsciously, to pay attention to certain aspects of

that communication and to color them in different ways. I'll return to this idea below,

but I'll leave the point with Nussbaum's unedited words, since, as she puts it, a

paraphrase would not do:

Conception and form are bound together; finding and shaping the words is a

matter of finding the appropriate and, so to speak, the honorable, fit between

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[32] C. Nussbaum, Martha. Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature_. Oxford University Press USA. 1992 Pg. 5

conception and expression. If the writing is well done, a paraphrase in a very different form and style will not, in general, express the same conception.[33]

Returning to the discussion above, we can already begin to see how the reading of novels, in virtue of their very form and nature as narrative, combats utilitarian rational-choice models of thinking and supports some of Nussbaum's four desirable criteria for adequate ethical and political theories. Specifically, the simple fact that stories involve characters and plot, independent of what they are, helps us develop the ability to appreciate the inner lives of others and to prioritize the particular through the cultivation of wonder. We wonder why a character performed an action, and in doing so we necessarily are both appreciating the inner, complex psychological life of that character, as well as prioritizing the character's particular situation, whatever it may be. What the character is thinking, the circumstances she finds herself in, and a host of other factors might be relevant in our wonderings about her psychological life. The structure of novels prevents us, even at the most basic level, from lumping all characters together, and forces us to pay attention to the specifics. This directly combats the crude, aggregative way of lumping the masses of human psychology into one single system of basic inputs and outputs and forces us to appreciate it for the more complex and situationally dependent phenomenon it is.

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[33] Ibid. Pg.5

We can also see how the marriage of form and content within a novel begins to lead to the other two desirable criteria for adequate ethical theories. With regard to the noncommensurability of valuable things, the fact that stories have multiple characters encourages us to appreciate the unique inner lives those characters live, and to do so in a way that takes into account the particular aspects of that character's situation. The genre of novel itself invites wonder in the reader, and this wonder encourages us to see the inner life of each character as being uniquely theirs. What's more, we see their inner lives as being unique and separable from our own inner life. The specificity of detail within a novel, be it on the literal page or imagined in the mind of the reader through wonder, teases apart valuable things, be them physical objects, a character's hope, dreams and desires, or the character's life itself, in such a way that avoids the pitfalls of the utilitarian rational-choice models of thinking. It's difficult to aggregate disparate items for comparison when the detailed differences in those items have been laid before you. Of course, hard decisions between valuable things are made in stories all the time, but the feeling of sacrifice experienced when such a situation occurs is a testament to the ability of narrative to appreciate the noncommensurability of valuable things. After all, what is sacrifice if not the difficult act of giving up something of value for something else of a qualitatively different value.

Similarly, the wonder created by the narrative form helps avoid Nussbaum's 4th pitfall of the utilitarian rational-choice model: the assumption that people's preferences are exogenous. As noted above, to think that people's preferences are exogenous is to

effectively say that people are solely self-interested, that all people's inner lives are governed by their connections to their external situations. The nature of narrative itself can't help but invite us to wonder about a character's motivations, beliefs, desires, and fears in such a way that grounds those mental states firmly within the character herself. Novels, particularly well-written ones, bring the inner lives of characters to life, and in doing so portray characters as more than the simple loci of interchangeable, context-dependent desires. Well-developed characters have a history, and that history informs the types of people those characters are, making them truly four-dimensional beings who stretch backwards in time. The wonder created by novels that feature such characters combats the tendency to see people's preferences as merely given, and instead situates them within a more deeply human context.

There is good reason to follow Nussbaum in the belief that the formal elements of the novel lay the groundwork for the cultivation of the literary imagination, but to achieve all the desired elements of an acceptable moral theory we need to add content. By content I mean the specifics of the story: who the characters actually are, where those characters live and work, with whom those characters interact, what their actual inner psychological lives are like, and so on. It is the flesh placed on the bare bones of a narrative's structure, giving it the life and vividness missing from the basic plot discussed above. Depending on how it is fleshed out, "C sets out to confront E" can become *Star Wars: A New Hope*, *Seven Samurai*, or *Beowulf,* and these different stories impact us in wildly different ways.

To explain how a novel's content might cultivate the literary imagination, Nussbaum develops the concept of "fancy," an idea she borrows from the Charles Dickens novel *Hard Times*. Fancy, according to Nussbaum, "is the novel's name for the ability to see one thing as another, to see one thing in another."[34] This ability, which Nussbaum also refers to as "the metaphorical imagination," is not unlike the imagination employed by children during play. Without prompting, a child might pick up a stick and imagine she is fighting back hordes of fire breathing dragons, or another child might imagine his favorite doll is alive, caring for it as he imagines a father would care for a newborn baby. In each of these examples a perception, that of the stick or of the doll, is endowed with qualities not existent in the real world. Each views the world not in a cold, crude-utilitarian sense, but with a sort of fancy, seeing a world where objects present themselves to us as more than just tools with a particular purpose.

On Nussbaum's view, when children engage in fancy and wonder they are not merely engaging in a useless play activity but learning something morally valuable. Engaging in fancy teaches us to endow perceived forms with rich and complex, non-use significance, to appreciate the value in what is not seen or sensed directly, and yet to also cherish things as they are in themselves. It teaches us that not everything has an instrumental use and that there is something beautiful in enjoyment for its own sake. As Nussbaum puts it, "it is not only the ability to endow a form with life that makes the

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[34] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 36

metaphorical imagination morally valuable; it is the ability to view what one has

constructed in fancy as serving no end beyond itself, as good and delightful for its self

alone."[35]

It should come as no surprise that novels encourage fancy among readers once

one stops to think of the tools novelists employ in the writing of their stories. Great

novels do more than just chronicle the events in characters' lives, they make statements

and commentaries about larger concepts, institutions, and situations. To do this,

authors draw from a variety of literary techniques and devices that aim to make the

reader view the characters, places, objects, and events of a novel as being more than

what they are presented as. Metaphor, simile, allegory, juxtaposition, symbolism, and

archetype are among the many techniques writers use to represent something as

possibly being more than what it is. In fact, one might argue, as Nussbaum does, that in

a way novels are themselves metaphors, asking the reader to "see the world in this way,

and not in that."[36] If fancy is the name of the ability to see one thing as another, then

the novel is perfectly suited for its cultivation.

A novel's content and how it is presented enables the cultivation of fancy and

wonder in the reader, and fancy and wonder are what ultimately aid in the construction

of adequate moral and political theories. First, fancy allows a person to see one thing as

another, and to do so in a way that is detached from its use or usefulness. The very form

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[35] Ibid. Pg 42
[36] Ibid. Pg 43

of narrative invites wonder, which also encourages a recognition of the uniqueness of a character's inner life. This leads the reader to attach a degree of noncommensurable value to the objects of her fancy and wonder. When a person views an object as good and delightful for itself alone, she has effectively taken that object off the value measuring scales. It is placed on its own pedestal, safe from the judgements of the crude-utilitarian rational choice model style of thinking. Just as a child may see her favorite toy as holding a value that is in no way connected to use or markets, so too does the adult engaging in fancy and wonder see objects as holding noncommensurable value that cannot be aggregated or maximized.

Second, fancy in particular is the perfect counter to the idea that desires are necessarily exogenous. Remember, this is the idea that a person's desires, beliefs, and intentions are cultivated through a mixture of self-interest and the belief that objects have only means-end, or use, value. But fancy breaks free of this scheme. A person engaging in fancy will see an object as being more than what it appears to be and imbue it with a value that is noncommensurable and divorced from use. Revisiting an example from above, Marie Antoinette assumed that cake would suffice to placate her subjects because she viewed them as having exogenous desires. If her subjects are self-interested and see objects as only possessing means-end value, then of course cake would be an acceptable means of satisfying their hunger. However, her subjects were able to see the cake through the eyes of fancy, as representing more than just a sweet confection with high caloric content. Instead, they saw the cake as representing the

lavish nature of the aristocracy that the lower class was desperately fighting against. Had Marie Antoinette possessed a literary imagination and been able to engage in fancy, perhaps she would have avoided the mythical declaration that resulted in her untimely demise.

The form and content of novels together work towards cultivating Nussbaum's literary imagination, and thus the building blocks for the creation of the four desirable criteria for adequate moral and political theories. Although Nussbaum is intentionally vague about the particular moral and political theories she wants people to contrast, I take her main argument to be that these four elements, the noncommensurability of valuable things, the priority of the particular over the aggregate, an appreciation of inner life and a resistance to maximization, and the ability to connect that inner life to a person's preferences are collectively necessary, but not sufficient, for the creation of adequate moral and political theories. Reading novels does not guarantee that a person will come up with the right world view, but a person without the abilities that novels cultivate will be unable to create a moral or political theory that is adequate for the creation of a flourishing, moral, democratic society.

Briefly, I'll touch upon Nussbaum's second claim about the reading of novels, that they develop the necessary capacities to make reality out of the normative conclusions our moral and political theories provide. At first, it seems like her two claims are one in the same. After all, it makes sense that the very capacities needed to construct a theory are also needed to make real its conclusions. However, I think that

Nussbaum separates these two claims for good reason. There is, in fact, a large

difference simply in terms of action between the creation of a moral or political theory

and the application of that theory to the real world and on real people. Just because we

have a theory, policy, or law that was created with the best of intentions does not mean

that its application will be done in such a way that upholds those intentions. It is

necessary for those who apply moral and political theories to maintain a particular set

of standards to ensure that those theories are dispensed properly.

For example, consider again the US Declaration of Independence. One could

read the declaration, particularly the opening section, as an articulation of a moral and

political theory, one that, I believe, showcases the type of thinking Nussbaum advocates

for. It outlines the need and justification for a democratic system that holds equality as

its highest ideal. However, the enactment of that theory, even by the very people who

penned it, has not always been in line with the principles at the core of its creation.

From the institution of slavery to the suppression of women's suffrage and beyond, the

principles captured by the moral and political theories outlined in the founding

documents of the United States have been applied in ways that undercut their own

principles.

This, I believe, is why Nussbaum sees the creation of adequate theories and their

execution as two separate concerns. As important as it is to possess a certain mindset

when creating a moral or political theory, it is just as, if not more, important to maintain

that same mindset when making real the conclusions of those theories, lest the application of said theories undercut the very goal the theories are trying to achieve.

To this point, I have tried to articulate Nussbaum's view that narratives, and particularly the ones found in novels, are crucial in making us the types of people who flourish in a democratic society. They do this by cultivating a literary imagination that not only aids in the creation of a particularly inclusive and democratically friendly set of moral and political theories, but also helps us employ those theories in an inclusive and moral way that appreciates the humanity of all.

Now, I turn to my own view on Nussbaum's work built out of a peculiarity in her view which will act as the jump off point for the remainder of this dissertation.

A Problem with Nussbaum's View: Form vs Content Revisited

There is an interesting discussion about nursery rhymes in the middle of *Poetic Justice* that I have always taken issue with and bears investigating further here. Nussbaum relates the story of an experience she had with a student in one of her law classes. While discussing the importance of literature, Nussbaum asks a student in attendance whether he had heard "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" as a child, and if so, how the rhyme made him feel. Apparently, the student immediately broke into a long, detailed explanation of how the song conjured fantastic images of radiant night skies for him as a child, images that were so impactful that they led him to see a similar scene in

the eyes of his pet dog, which further led him to wonder about the inner life of his canine friend. This cathartic experience then carried over to thoughts about his friends and even his own parents, resulting in him having new ways of thinking about his own parents as individuals living their own lives, an experience that no doubt impacted the way this student thought about others for years to come. All from a mere nursey rhyme.

I don't want to take anything away from this student's experience. As someone who has been brought to tears by pop songs that forced me to look at the world in different ways, I understand perhaps better than most that catharsis can come from the most unlikely of places.[37] It's Nussbaum's evaluation of this story, however, that I find somewhat puzzling. After recalling her law student's words, Nussbaum wonders why the nursery rhyme made him feel hopeful and reflective rather than fearful and full of hate. Her conclusion is that the song itself nourishes an ascription of humanity. As she puts it, the nursery rhyme

> Tells the child to regard the star as "like a diamond," not like a missile of destruction, and also not like a machine good only for production and consumption. In this sense, the birth of fancy is non-neutral and does, as Dickens indicates, nourish a generous construction of the seen.[38]

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[37] It's slightly embarrassing to admit the number of times this sort of thing has happened to me. Truth be told, I'm somewhat obsessed with well-known songs that have a deeper meaning or message than most listeners are aware of. See the songs "Chandelier" by Sia or "Brick" by Ben Folds Five as perfect examples of this.
[38] Ibid. Pg. 39

If we are to read "generous construction of the seen" as something akin to "a charitable interpretation of an observation" or perhaps even something as simple as an optimistic outlook on the world, then I can't help but think that the student's rosy outlook was brought about not by the form or manner in which the rhyme was presented, but rather the specific words that were chosen. Nussbaum attempts to make the case that fancy itself is "non-neutral," and she implies that it is always leaning in a positive, beneficial, and wonder-inducing direction. Until now, Nussbaum has led us to believe that the reading of novels, through a blending of the form and content, is always a beneficial experience that creates a certain type of positively valenced wonder and fancy that aid in the creation a life-affirming moral and political outlooks.

But what if the nursery rhyme *had* likened the star to a "missile of destruction"? That's the thought I continually come back to. What if the nursey rhyme did indeed tell children that the star only had value insofar as it could be mined for raw materials, like a machine only good for production and consumption? Would it still cultivate wonder and fancy within the children who hear it? Would it make them wonder about the inner lives of their dogs and parents in the way Nussbaum's law student did?

The answer to these questions, I believe, is "it's complicated," and betrays a flaw, although not a critical one, in Nussbaum's overall view. Throughout all of Nussbaum's writings on narrative, from *Poetic Justice* to *Love's Knowledge* to *The*

Fragility of Goodness[39] and beyond, she makes a strong case, as I have presented thus far, that the reading of literature makes us better members of a democratic society, a society in which we need to properly take into account the perspectives of other people.

This I do not disagree with. But it's difficult to ignore that Nussbaum limits her examples to widely celebrated works of fiction, novels that not only have a beautiful narrative form, but also contain content that overtly fights against the very type of utilitarian rational choice thinking that she is worried about. For example, the central example in *Poetic Justice* is the book *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, a novel that is fairly universally seen as an outright satire and negative critique of the philosophical theory of utilitarianism.[40] In this way, *Hard Times* is not unlike Voltaire's *Candide*, which is itself an outright satire and negative critique of philosophies employed by the likes of Gottfried Leibniz.

Imagine someone holding up *Candide* as an example of how reading novels qua novel helps readers cultivate attitudes that combat Leibnizian optimism. Certainly, *that* novel helps fight Leibnizian optimism, but undermining that way of thought is one of the express reasons Voltaire wrote the book to begin with. That is what it is actively trying to do. Holding it up as an exemplar of how all novels fight Leibnizian optimism, however,

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[39] In particular, I have in mind Nussbaum's discussion of Greek tragedies during her chapter on luck and ethics. See pages 12-21 specifically for an overview, but the point is made throughout the entirety of the book.

[40] See Nayak and Mohapatra's 1995 paper "Utilitarianism at Home and Abroad" and Kingel's 1986 paper "Dickens's First Epistle to the Utilitarians" for just two examples of this belief.

is a hasty generalization at best and runs dangerously close to cherry picking or question begging.

Of course, Nussbaum cites more examples than just *Hard Times*. Walt Whitman, Henry James, and E.M. Forster are also touted as exemplars that prove the theory. But again, these authors are all revered as some of the greatest to ever live, and all deal in themes of class differences and democratic ideals, and all arguably set out intentionally to instill a sense of wonder about the lives of people unlike the reader. Again, these examples seemed cherry picked to prove the point that Nussbaum wants to make, but she fails to properly take into account the fact that the very examples she provides all have the express intention of instilling the qualities in readers that Nussbaum seeks.

There are hints early on in Poetic Justice that Nussbaum is sensitive to this point. While discussing the genre of the novel itself, Nussbaum notes that "not every work that has many common features of the genre will prove equally valuable for citizenship."[41] She goes on to say that "ethical assessment of the novels themselves, in conversation both with other readers and with the arguments of moral and political theory, is therefore necessary,"[42] but this is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons.

First, Nussbaum never returns to this thought for further exploration. Instead, she continues to use language, throughout all her works, that leads the reader to believe that novels, in virtue of their very form, "point in the direction of some political

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[41] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 10
[42] Ibid. 10

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theories rather than others."[43] Additionally, Nussbaum never says that the reading of

some novels achieve her desired results, or that the reading of a particular set of novels

that deal on a particular theme will prove beneficial to the reader, but that the reading

of novels full stop is what makes the difference. In fact, her discussion on the

connection of form and content found in *Poetic Justice* and *Love's Knowledge* undercut

her reservations that ethical assessment of novels must be carried out to determine

how beneficial the reading of those novels might be.

Which leads me to my second issue: if the goal of reading novels is to aid in the

construction and execution of adequate moral and political theories, then it is a bit odd

to claim that a novel must first be assessed by the arguments of moral and political

theory to see if it is capable of achieving its task. There is a sort of circular logic here that

I'm frankly uncomfortable with. Nussbaum does make sure to say that the reading of

novels alone is not sufficient and never outright says it is necessary for the formation of

adequate moral and political theories, but the insistence that such a theory must be in

place prior to the reading of a novel defeats the whole point of reading the novel to

begin with. Why read novels for the purpose of creating a particular way of thought if

that way of thought must already be in place to pick the right novels to read? Granted,

we could say that people other than the reader already have these adequate theories in

place and have chosen the right novels for those who don't yet posses these theories,

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[43] Ibid. 12

but this, I would venture a guess, is a level of paternalism that Nussbaum might not be comfortable with.

Perhaps Nussbaum could appeal to the need for a well thought out K-12 education system that incorporates literature as a prominent feature to get the ball rolling, so to speak. The idea being that early exposure to known exemplar novels might be enough to form proto ethical and political theories that the children could then use as a basis for picking "the right" novels to read in the future. With each successive exposure to great literature, the theories are refined and thus the picking of better novels in the future is enhanced, creating a sort of upwards spiral. Seeing as how most children in the United States are already forced to read a number of "great novels" this is highly plausible, and it would mesh well with Nussbaum's general views about the importance of education found elsewhere. However, since Nussbaum never even hints at a scenario like this, I'm left thinking she means for novels to have a more universal impact that doesn't require this sort of a kickstart. That being said, this may be a way out of the circular logic problem.

But stepping back from Nussbaum's portrayal of literature for a moment, we simply know that some novels and stories can cause, and in fact have caused, great harm. North Korea is well known for indoctrinating its children through the use of stories, songs, and nursey rhymes to hate the West and the United States in particular.[44]

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[44] See Anna Fitfield's book "The Great Successor: The Divinely Perfect Destiny of Brilliant Comrade Kim Jong Un" for a wonderfully researched account of this.

In fact, the use of propaganda often takes on a narrative form, regardless of when and for what purpose the propaganda is employed. George Orwell himself stated, in an essay criticizing the work of Dickens, I might add, that "all art is propaganda," which betrays the fact that a story, be it in novel form or otherwise, can't help but express a world view, and that world view might carry one in a direction antithetical to Nussbaum's claims.[45]

Take, for example, the 1905 novel *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* by Thomas Dixon which was adapted into the 1915 D.W. Griffith film *The Birth of a Nation. The Birth of a Nation* was, and still is, heralded by many as one of the most important films in the history of the medium.[46] What makes this example so powerful and disturbing is the fact that the film *The Birth of a Nation* was, by all accounts, an amazing piece of art, one that propelled the art of film making forward, with notable film critic of the time James Agee pointing out that the film contained "the most beautiful shot I have ever seen in any movie." It is a narrative work that inspired emotions and reflection in ways that Nussbaum claims novels can.

But *The Birth of a Nation*, as well as the novel it was adapted from, furthers a moral view that is absolutely reprehensible and repugnant to Nussbaum's democratic ideals. What makes it particularly pernicious is that these works attempt to capitalize on

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[45] George Orwell *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* 1962 Penguin Books
[46] For those interested in a deeper explanation of this claim, I turn you towards the great Roger Ebert's "Great Movie" review of the film: www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-birth-of-a-nation-1915

the beneficial aspects of narrative, such as its ability to evoke wonder and fancy, in order to sway minds towards its twisted world view. By beautifully portraying scenes of bravery and valor together with scenes of the KKK fighting against the "injustices" they see occurring during postwar reconstruction, the film, as well as the novel, play on the medium's ability to encourage empathy for the purposes of glorifying a racist ideology. Like Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, a film commissioned by Adolf Hitler to glorify the Nazi Party, or even Hitler's own *Mein Kampf*, many works are not created with the same goals and aspirations as Dicken's *Hard Times*.

However, we need not even go so far as to point out literary works with obviously evil intent to find problems with the view that novels qua novel are beneficial. There are also matters of interpretation to deal with. Naturally, not all people who read a novel will be impacted in precisely the same way. A person's upbringing, social status, history, culture, and general physical context can alter and change the way a person interprets a story, and thus changes the messages and lessons received from that story.

Take for example J.D. Salinger's influential 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, a story about a young man struggling to find a place for himself in the world. Although the book is widely heralded as one of the greatest American novels ever written and is even assigned to many school children as required reading, there have been many instances of the book being cited as inspiration for shootings and murders. Perhaps most famously, Mark Chapman was arrested after murdering John Lennon with a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* in his pocket with the words "this is my statement" scrawled inside.

Police also found the book in the hotel room of John Hinckley, the man who attempted

to assassinate President Ronal Reagan. Robert Bardo, the man who murdered actress

Rebecca Schaffer, was also carrying a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* when he committed

his crime.

My point here is not that reading Salinger's book is what made these men

commit their horrible acts. The full explanation, I take it, is much more complicated.

However, these were all individuals who read one of the most celebrated novels in

literature and interpreted it in a way that cultivated within them attitudes that are

almost the opposite of what Nussbaum believes the reading of these sorts of novels

should create. We could possibly explain away this phenomenon with appeal to mental

illness, but that would be to drastically underestimate the range in attitudes healthy,

well-adjusted people could have as a result of reading the same material. A coming of

age tale depicting hardships and struggles might make one appreciate the inner lives of

others engaging with the human condition in their own ways, while making another see

the futility of living in a world that is full of nothing but pain and suffering.

Although, I believe, this poses a problem for Nussbaum's view, it isn't without

recourse, and in a way, her own seemingly odd separation of narrative form and

narrative content paves a way for accounting for these problems. According to

Nussbaum, the very structure of narrative itself is mostly responsible for the beneficial

impact narrative has on us. As she states in Love's Knowledge, there are certain aspects

of human life for which "literary narrative of a certain sort is the only type of text that

can state them fully and fittingly, without contradiction."[47] Again, the way an idea is presented, via argument, poem, narrative, or other, necessarily shapes the content and alters the message. Together they form a powerful team that creates within us the literary imagination, and together they work their beneficial magic on us.

But what if we take the division of narrative form and content further? What if we cleave them apart entirely and imagine what they do for us individually? That is what I would like to propose now, that the form of a narrative is itself responsible for the creation of the literary imagination, which I see as a sort of skill, while the content is what ultimately directs the application of that skill. Seen as independent forces, it is much easier to both see the amazing benefits that Nussbaum details, as well as the ways in which narrative can be misused and lead us astray.

First, I want to take a closer look at what the literary imagination actually is, independent of what makes it valuable. Nussbaum has argued, successfully, I believe, that the literary imagination is a collection of moral capacities, ones centered around the notions of wonder and fancy. Wonder, put simply, is the ability to imagine the inner lives of others, while fancy is the ability to see one thing as another, to appreciate things simply as they are, and to see value in things in themselves. Nussbaum refers to this

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[47] C. Nussbaum, Martha. Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature. Oxford University Press USA. 1992 Pg. 7

aspect of the literary imagination as the "metaphorical imagination."[48] Nussbaum sums

up this ability in a discussion of a scene from Dickens's *Hard Times*:

> Here we see all the abilities of fancy, deftly woven together: its ability to endow
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> a perceived form with rich and complex significance; its generous construction of
>
> the seen; its preference for wonder over pat solutions; its playful and surprising
>
> movements, delightful for their own sake; its tenderness, its eroticism, its awe
>
> before the fact of human mortality.[49]

Note again here that Nussbaum refers to fancy specifically as an ability. Never

does Nussbaum give any indication that the literary imagination, be it in its wonder or

fancy form, grant us something like knowledge, insight, or wisdom. Rather, it is always

referred to by the abilities it grants the novel reader. The literary imagination helps us

do things, not know things. We don't read novels and necessarily learn something about

ourselves and others that we didn't know before, on Nussbaum's view.[50] Instead, we

become better at doing something, or acquire the ability to do something we couldn't

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[48] See page 36 of Poetic Justice. It is not entirely clear whether Nussbaum means to say that the entirety of the literary imagination may also be thought of as a metaphorical imagination, or if it is only fancy itself that should be thought of in that way. Either way, it doesn't impact the thrust of my argument here.

[49] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 43

[50] Of course, we certainly *can* learn things from novels, and hopefully we generally do. My point is that Nussbaum's literary imagination is not grounded in the acquisition of knowledge, but rather in the acquisition of skill.

do before outright. This, I believe, is the key to understanding the distinction between what the form of narrative does for us and what the content of narrative does for us.

Although I hesitate to delve into a realm that might get us off-topic, I think it's useful here to point out a resemblance this understanding of the literary imagination has to some of the empirical work done on theory of mind. Theory of mind, among other things, is a person's ability to understand and attribute mental states to oneself and to others. The abilities granted by a robust theory of mind is crucial for the navigation of social spaces. Without the ability to attribute beliefs, intentions, desires, and even knowledge to yourself and others, and, crucially, the ability to understand that the mental states of you and others may differ, it would be exceedingly difficult to take part and flourish in society in the ways that Nussbaum thinks we should.

I am not trying to argue that Nussbaum's literary imagination simply is referring to a theory of mind, but the similarities, particularly with regard to wonder, are striking and useful to consider. The literary imagination is an ability that allows us to wonder about the inner lives of others, to see them as having their own hopes, desires, fears, and ambitions that are uniquely theirs and distinct from our own. To see those inner lives as being more than simply given, but as being representative of a rich, human existence that is simultaneously not unlike our own yet also wholly the creation of that other person.

Furthermore, it is amazing to me how some of the studies that test mental state attribution and theory of mind demonstrate the link between these abilities and

narrative. In Heider and Simmel's classic 1944 experiment, research participants were shown videos of shapes moving around on a screen.[51] In the video, a large triangle is seen inside a larger rectangle. Then, a smaller triangle and a circle enter the scene, and the larger triangle exits the rectangle and moves around the two new shapes. The circle then enters the rectangle, followed by the larger triangle. Soon, the circle leaves the rectangle and the smaller triangle and circle leave the screen.

When asked to describe what they have watched, participants, with very few exceptions, used language that attributed agency to the shapes, if not outright anthropomorphizing them. But what I find even more interesting is that most participants turn what they see into a little story, imagining a set of characters that are applied onto the shapes and devising whole narrative arcs to the scene they have observed. After watching the scene described above, many participants imagined the triangles fighting over the circle in some way, with an epic fight taking place that has a beginning, middle, and end.

Of course, it seems clear to me that the investigators in this particular experiment designed this video with a narrative arc in mind. But even in more simple designs, people still imagine narrative arcs. For instance, in scenes that simply depict a small ball moving through a small gap followed by a larger ball attempting to move through the same gap, being unable to, and then moving around the side, 75% of adults

[51] Heider, F., & Simmel, M. (1944). An experimental study of apparent behavior. *The American Journal of Psychology, 57,* 243–259.

either personified the balls or used intentional language to describe what they observed (e.g. the larger ball chased the small one or the small ball outsmarted the big ball.)[52] One could argue that this scene, too, has a built-in narrative structure, but I believe the point still remains: humans seem to have a built-in ability to attribute mental states to other beings and objects, and this ability is used to create a sort of narrative understanding of the world around us.

The similarities between what the literary imagination cultivates within us and what researchers label as mental state attribution and theory of mind is quite jarring, and much more could be said about the connection here. That would, unfortunately, take me beyond the scope of the current project. The connection is also not perfect. Nussbaum's literary imagination involves far more than can be attributed to a theory of mind, for example, the various mechanisms involved in fancy seem above and beyond what could reasonably be seen as a theory of mind. But seeing the connection to this field better helps us understand the literary imagination as a sort of skill, and perhaps one that is innate within us from a very early age. A skill, perhaps, that the consumption of narrative exercises and grows. A skill that, as Nussbaum believes, equips us to navigate a democratic society in a moral and equitable way.

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[52] Wagner, L. and S. Carey (2003) Individuation of Objects & Events: A Developmental Study. *Cognition 90* (2), 163 - 191.

Literary Theory of Mind

What I would like to propose is that the form of narrative itself is responsible for the cultivation of what I call a literary theory of mind. This ability, not unlike but more robust than the traditional theory of mind, helps us imagine the inner lives of others, to wonder about their hopes, dreams, fears, and ambitions, to engage in Nussbaum's activity of fancy, and to see objects and people as both symbolic of other things yet as uniquely themselves as well. In short, it's the ability to fully understand and appreciate the fullness and complexity of a narrative world, its characters, their motivations, the plot, and how all of it relates and contributes to one another and to apply that to the world writ large.

It's a set of skills that help us navigate a social world in a particular way, similar to how the traditional theory of mind helps us navigate a world with others. But what sets this view apart from Nussbaum's literary imagination is that the literary theory of mind simply refers to the skillset the consumption of narrative cultivates within us, and not their application. As I will try to argue, whereas the form of narrative cultivates the literary theory of mind, the content of that narrative directs how the literary theory of mind is applied in the world.

Although this is in no way a Kantian view, I find myself inspired by one of Kant's more famous thoughts. At the beginning of Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, he states that "there is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world,

or indeed anything at all outside of it, that can be good without limitation, excepting only a good will."[53] The idea is roughly this: nothing, save for the good will, can be thought of as good unless it is directed by the good will. Even things that are universally considered good in and of themselves, like health or intelligence, are only good insofar as they are directed by the good will. Is it good that the evil mastermind is healthy and more intelligent than the police who chase her? Certainly not, according to Kant.

So, too, it occurred to me, are the skills Nussbaum associates with the literary imagination only good insofar as they are utilized or directed in a certain way. As discussed above, the content of a novel or narrative might make quite a bit of difference in how the skills gained by the literary imagination are employed. Those who read and were gripped by the novel *The Clansman*, or those who watched the film adaptation, arguably gained the sorts of skills Nussbaum articulates in her view. They were able to wonder about the inner lives of others and see individuals in a metaphorical way, and certainly they garnered feelings of kinship with those they closely identified with.

Unfortunately, these abilities were directed by the toxic and morally repugnant content that was laid upon the narrative structure of the novel. Individuals taken in by *The Clansman* imagined the inner lives of those around them but were directed and encouraged by the content of the novel to see the inner lives of white men as drastically different than the inner lives of black men. Their ability to see one thing as another was

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[53] Kant, I., Wood, A. W., & Schneewind, J. B. (2002). *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

certainly activated but the content of the narrative directed them to see white Southerners as heroic revolutionaries and black men and their supporters as subhuman animals. I believe it's hard to argue that such individuals simply weren't thinking about the inner lives of the people they hated or that they failed to utilize a metaphoric understanding of their intrinsic value. On the contrary, what is so tragic, and disturbing, is that they in fact do both of these things, but the way in which they do it has been so twisted and poisoned.

Nussbaum might argue that there is something about the form of narrative itself that lends it more easily to humane content rather than the more toxic kind found in the likes of *Clansman* or *The Birth of a Nation*. This would make sense given the history of literature as it is certainly easier to find examples of novels with what I would call positive content than negative content. But even if this is true, it would be a statement about the creation of narrative content and not about the way in which narrative impacts us. Even if the form of narrative lends itself to the creation of more positive, life-affirming content, we still cannot ignore the fact that narratives that do in fact have toxic content seem to have the same persuasive power as those with positive, even if their numbers are fewer.

My view, however, can more easily account for these troubling counterexamples to Nussbaum's view. I agree with Nussbaum that novels, or narrative broadly, has an impact on us. I also agree that they help cultivate certain abilities within us, abilities that help us live in a world with other people. Where I disagree, however, is in my

understanding of *how* these changes come about. According to my view, there is something about the form of narrative itself that either creates, augments, or strengthens certain abilities within us. I call these abilities collectively the literary theory of mind. But it is the content that is laid over that form that can impact the way we utilize a literary theory of mind in the world. Think of narrative form like the bootcamp that strengthens your abilities and the content like the general who directs them to be used in battle.

The idea that narrative form alone, independent of content, can have an impact on us, or that form exists independent of content at all, is admittedly a tough sell and needs at least some brief theoretical defense, which I will attempt to deliver here. To begin with, think about what narrative actually is. Narratives, broadly speaking, are stories, stories in which characters in a certain place and time do certain things and experience certain events. But it's more than just a list of facts. For example, a numbered list of names, places, dates, and events would, in and of itself, not a story make. Granted, we may begin to make connections and imagine a narrative emerge from a list of this sort, but that may be because we already posses a literary theory of mind.[54]

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[54] Studies show that individuals with autism, as well as certain other groups that have diminished theory of mind, have difficulty attributing mental states. I would venture a guess, and it would be worth investigating, that people with diminished theory of mind also have difficulty seeing narratives structure. If so, that would lend further credibility to my view.

For something to become a true narrative, these facts must be arranged in a certain way. Not arranged in a physical sense, per se, but in some manner of presentation that emphasizes certain relational qualities between the elements. Returning to the basic narrative formula discussed above, we can represent a basic plot by utilizing a sort of bare bones schematic like C does X to overcome E. Or C and D fight E to achieve F and win G. The variables are, by definition, interchangeable, and irrelevant to what makes theses sorts of schematics narrative in form. What makes these narratives, and not something else like a shopping list or actuarial table, is precisely the relationships between the elements. Narrative form is relational in nature, it's a particular real or perceived connection of one thing to another. It's a way our brains organize perceptions and experiences in such a way as to make sense of the world in a way that helps us navigate it, particularly in situation with other people engaged in a similar endeavor. In other words, the form of narrative isn't itself a "thing," but rather it's a way of connecting things, like a further abstracted mental blueprint. What makes something a narrative will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

It is exposure to information arranged in this way, or even information that appears to be arranged in this way, that invites us to begin imagining connections, attributing mental states, and imagining the inner lives of the characters presented. To understand a narrative connection between two things, say, a character and an action that character performs, we must understand or imagine a whole host of information. What made that character perform that action? What was going on in the character's

head that led her to take that action? Why would she do it? And the more relational

elements we add in, the more we need to understand and imagine to make sense of it.

Perhaps we add in that the character performed some action to achieve some specific

goal. Is the goal worthwhile? How do we connect that action to the goal? Does it make

sense given what we know about the character? Our minds spin up and set out to make

sense of these relational elements.

The sheer fact that things in the world have a particular relationship to one

another forces our brains to begin imagining a wide variety of information to make

sense of those relations. The abilities to embark on these imaginings, the skills required

to fill in the information needed to make sense of the narrative relationship between

observed objects and events, is what I call the literary theory of mind, and it is

something one can get better at with continued exposure to the narrative form.

There may also be some empirical support for these ideas. In 2013, David Kidd

and Emanuele Castano conducted a series of experiments that showed that reading

literary fiction temporarily enhanced the traditional theory of mind in research

participants.[55] Interestingly, the researchers found more improvement on theory of

mind tests after reading literary fiction than after reading non-fiction.[56] Perhaps most

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[55] Kidd, David Comer and Emanuele Castano. "Reading literary fiction improves theory of mind." Science 342 6156 (2013): 377-80

[56] I think much more research should be done on this topic. It is possible that the fiction used in the studies invited more wonder and fancy type thinking than did the nonfiction. I would imagine, however, that narratives of similar quality, whether they are fiction or not, would produce the same level of theory of mind improvement. I suspect the difference found here, then, are the result of narrative type and quality independent of the fictional nature of the text.

importantly for our purposes here, Kidd and Castano found that the content of the narrative made no difference in the observed boost to performance on theory of mind tests. This suggests that it is the narrative itself that is responsible for the theory of mind boost and not the content, which lines up with the theory I have presented here.

A literary theory of mind is tremendously useful, but only insofar as it is directed by the proper content. Who the characters are, what they are fighting, how they are described, and a whole host of other elements of a narrative matter greatly in how the narrative consumer employs the literary theory of mind, and this is the one thing that Nussbaum does not take enough time to consider. The reading of novels itself, in virtue of their narrative form, cultivates within us abilities that can in fact help us live flourishing, democratic, moral lives. But the content matters greatly. Nussbaum sees the form and content of novels as an inexorable force that pushes us towards democratic lives, but in separating the two and seeing how each individually impacts us, it is easier to make sense of the observed real-world effects of reading novels. I maintain that Nussbaum is absolutely right that the reading of novels, and exposure to narrative in general, is an important aspect of creating citizens that can flourish in a civil, democratic society, but the real story, so to speak, is simply more complicated, and more prone to error, than she is willing to accept.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to layout Martha Nussbaum's view of the literary imagination and show why she thinks the reading of novels is so important to citizens living in a civil society. I've articulated a major potential problem with her view and attempted to salvage it by the introduction of the literary theory of mind. On my view, the form of narrative itself helps us cultivate a set of skills called the literary theory of mind, and it is the content of narratives that helps dictate how those skills are employed in the world.

I believe that narrative is profoundly important. Until this point, both Nussbaum and I have stayed largely in the realm of theory. Now, I would like to embark on a journey through the literature on a psychological phenomenon called "narrative transport." This psychological mechanism, I believe, is the way in which narratives have the impact on us that they have, and in studying it and its effects we will gain a better picture of how narratives change us and how they might be better used to make us better people. I also believe that a walk through the empirical literature will lend support to my view, that the form of narrative emboldens a set of skills while the content of narrative impacts the way those skills cash out, so to speak.

So, let's take a step out of the world of theory and learn about how narratives have a lasting impact on those who read them.

Chapter 2

Narrative Transport

One day, I believe, it will eventually be seen that for a long time one of the most remarkable failures of our scientific approach to understanding the world was not to perceive that our urge to imagine stories is something just as much governed by laws which lay it open to scientific investigation as the structures of the atom or the genome.

-Christopher Booker

The Seven Basic Plots

Introduction

Until now, my investigation into the importance of narrative has been isolated to the theoretical realm. Nussbaum, I believe, offers a convincing argument for why the reading of novels, or at least being exposed to quality narratives, is crucial for developing the abilities that make us flourishing members of a civil, democratic society. Although I disagree with Nussbaum over some of the finer points regarding narrative's impact on us, I believe that her overall picture is roughly correct: Narrative can be vitally important and can bestow upon us valuable skills, skills that, when paired with a

particular type of content, can have a powerful effect on how we view the world and people around us, and in fact can influence the types of people we become.

Unfortunately, Nussbaum offers no empirical support for either the impact narratives have on us nor the mechanisms by which these changes occur. Nussbaum, and I, for that matter, are making concrete claims about the world, and as such, we should be able to provide some support by way of empirical evidence that these changes actually happen. It's one thing to sing the abstract praises of novels, quite another to point to hard evidence that the benefits you theorize actually materialize in the real world.

In this chapter, I will present the empirical case for the importance of narratives by focusing on the literature for a phenomenon called "narrative transport." Anyone who is fond of reading has had the experience of being "sucked in" by a good book, that feeling where the real world around you seems to fade away as the world of the book rushes forward to envelop your senses. Pages flip seemingly under their own power as your eyes eagerly pass over each sentence and time flies by unnoticed, often into the late hours of the evening. Well-told stories have a certain power over us, one that commands our attention and momentarily captures our minds. This experience is so prevalent that, fittingly, one of the very first modern novels, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, tells the tale of a man who has read so many books that he loses his touch on reality and begins to meld the worlds of fact and fiction.

Although most of us safely return from our mental journeys into narrative worlds, we generally do not return from these journeys in the exact state we embarked. Being transported by a good story is an experience, and as such, we return from that experience with new memories and sometimes even return with new outlooks and attitudes about the real world around us. Just as one might return from a physical journey a changed person, so too might a mental journey into a narrative world change us in profound ways.

This fairly common experience has been studied in many ways and from within many different academic disciplines. In what follows, I will present that body of literature and make the case that what researchers call narrative transportation is the mechanism responsible for the changes we experience after consuming narratives.

What Is a Narrative?

Before going into the specifics of narrative transport, it might be useful to briefly discuss the nature of narrative itself. What makes a string of sentences on a page a narrative rather than something else like a report, a list, an argument, or a description? What makes a speech or address move from an exposition to a story? Narratives can be found in many, many forms, and although we may have an intuitive sense of when something is or is not a narrative, it's challenging to pin down precisely what it is that makes a thing have a narrative form.

Making definitive statements about what is and is not a narrative are difficult,

but I think we can make some general classifications and observations that will help us

make more sense of the domain in which narrative transport is to live. It is important to

note here that I am not attempting to offer a rigorous and exact definition of narrative,

nor am I attempting to offer a philosophical theory of the nature of narrative structure.

Neither of these would be necessary for my current investigation and likely impossible

given the vast literature on the subject. Rather, by presenting various approaches and

school of thought on the nature of narrative I hope to give us a solid sense of what we

are actually talking about when we discuss narrative transport.

As with most things, I find it helpful to begin with Aristotle's thoughts, if only

because his thoughts on narrative continue to be generally agreed upon to this day and

are, actually, quite relevant to the specific nature of narrative transport. In *Poetics*,

Aristotle discusses the nature of "imitative arts," or arts that are, at their core,

attempting to imitate life or at least some aspect of life in some way.[57] For Aristotle, this

includes all types of poetry, plays, stories, various types of instrument playing, and even

types of dance. Although he has no distinct "narrative" category, Aristotle's

investigation into the structure of stories found in plays, and tragedies in particular, is

instructive in separating narrative from other types of art and language (and perhaps

even good narrative from bad). Aristotle does make interesting comments about a

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[57] BARNES, JONATHAN, editor. *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation*. REV - Revised ed., Princeton University Press, 1984. Pg. 2316-2340

nameless further form of imitation that uses language alone and then makes reference

to Socratic Conversations as an example. It's possible he means philosophical dialogues

that imitate life by telling stories while not using meter in the way of Homer and the

other epic poets, or possibly he means the entirety of non-poetic story writers.[58]

Without further evidence, it seems our best bet is to take Aristotle's thoughts on tragic

plays to be representative of narrative generally.

Aristotle identifies six parts of every tragedy: plot, character, diction, thought,

spectacle, and melody. Spectacle refers to the actual acting out or performance of a

written story, and as such does not concern our investigation into the nature of

narrative itself. Similarly, melody references the meter or spoken rhythm with which the

written lines are delivered by the actor, and also are not germane to our discussion.[59] By

diction Aristotle means the composition of the verses, this may be relevant to the

quality of the narrative, but again not relevant to what makes the words or performance

a narrative and not something else like history or argument.

Of the remaining three parts, thought is perhaps the least important, although it

may also help determine the quality of a narrative and help determine the sort of effect

that narrative will have. Thought, according to Aristotle, is "the power of saying

whatever can be said or what is appropriate to the occasion."[60] In other words, thought

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[58] 1447a28

[59] Spectacle and melody may be relevant to what make a film or other performed narrative effective, but I don't think they are a part of what makes a narrative a narrative itself.

[60] 1450b5

is the major theme or message that a narrative is trying to convey. It is the overarching

point the author of the narrative wants to impart to those receiving her story. Although

it is certainly possible that a narrative could have "no point," so to speak, this element is

perhaps crucial for the direction of the literary theory of mind detailed in the previous

chapter. This is a point I will return to later when we arrive at the empirical studies for

narrative transport.

This leaves us with character and plot, the two central elements of narrative. Of

these two, Aristotle holds plot above character as the most important element of a

tragedy or narrative. This, I believe, makes intuitive sense. Although it is difficult to

imagine a story without characters, it is impossible, Aristotle argues, to have a story

without a plot. Character, he thinks, is that element of the story that "reveals the choice

of agents," in other words, it is the element that introduces some sort of being with

which we can identify and wonder about its inner life. To further drive home the

primacy of plot over character, Aristotle actually argues that we could imagine stories

without character at all, but never a story without action in the form of a plot. Here he

seems to be thinking of cases of poetry and painting in which a sort of narrative is told

without reference to any agential choice.[61]

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[61] This view, that a narrative is possible without character, is a byproduct of Aristotle's conception of character as that element that reveals an agent's choice. We can imagine a beautiful nature scene that seems to tell a story without reference to an agent, but a modern person would likely consider nature or some other force or concept as the main character of the told story.

Plot, for Aristotle, is the key to narrative. It is the order that gives life and importance to the work as a whole. As Aristotle helpfully puts it, the most beautiful colors placed on a canvas without order will not have the same impact as even the most basic black-and-white sketch done with intentionality and purpose. Each of the five other elements are themselves either optional, dependent upon the manner in which the narrative is presented, or merely a factor in how effective a narrative is. Plot, alone, it seems for Aristotle, is what truly makes a narrative a narrative.

What is perhaps most interesting, and what most carries over into the modern-day conception of narrative, is Aristotle's emphasis on the temporal nature of plot. The most important element of a narrative, for Aristotle, is "the combination of the incidents of the story."[62] By this, he means the organization of the events, or plot points, within the story. The order in which things happen, or the temporal relationships between events and actions within the story, are crucially important to making a narrative a narrative. Furthermore, Aristotle, points out that a narrative must represent an action as a whole, meaning it needs to posses a beginning, a middle, and an end. Since on this view narrative is an imitative art, and the thing being imitated in narrative is action and life, it must portray an action in whole if it is to be satisfying and effective. This does not mean that a story must cover an entire life from beginning to end, but it does need to not leave the story receiver "hanging," so to speak. Whatever action or

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[62] 1450a15

event the plot is portraying needs to contain the beginning, middle, and end elements if

it is to successfully imitate that action.[63]

And this leaves Aristotle to what is, I believe, his most important point regarding

narrative: the intention of the author is centrally important. Ask yourself this: if a

defining characteristic of narrative is the temporal arrangement of incidents, how are

we to differentiate narrative and poetry from something like history that shares many of

these narrative elements? After all, both are primarily concerned with laying out events

in a particular temporal order with a beginning, a middle, and an end. We could even

imagine a historian employing elements of character, diction, spectacle and melody in

the accurate presentation of a historical battle. What would make that a distinct

endeavor from that of the literary author?

The difference, according to Aristotle, is that "the one describes the thing that

has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be."[64] [65] I take Aristotle's point here

to be that those engaged in the creation of narratives are doing more than merely

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[63] A note here about what the notions of "beginning, middle, and end" are meant to convey for Aristotle. My understanding is that these terms are meant to represent more than simple temporal or plot-based content, but to have a sort of metaphorical content. Recall that "thought" is one of the six parts of tragedy and is meant to convey the theme or message of the narrative. Seeing as how a story for Aristotle is meant to imitate life, the beginning, middle, and end of a story is meant to represent either life as a whole, or the way in which we experience events within a life, as also having a beginning, middle, and end. In this way, narratives require a beginning, middle, and end in order to properly convey the thought of the piece, which is a crucial element for Aristotle. This brings his view of narrative even closer to Nussbaum's, in my view.

[64] 1451b4

[65] It could be argued that this rules out any non-fictional narratives, but I don't believe that would be the case. Even factual accounts can be presented in an artistic way that leads the audience to wonder what might be in the way Aristotle means here. In my opinion, anything that draws attention to and/or comments on the human condition is elevated to the highest form of art, and non-fiction done right can certainly accomplish this.

describing events as they happened, but rather intend to convey some deeper truths. This makes the events found in poetry and tragedy more philosophical, or as Aristotle puts it, of a graver import than the same sort of story found in something like history.[66] The authors of the imitative art of narrative have an intentionality beyond that of the mere conveyance of events. Rather, they are geared towards more universal truths.

According to Aristotle, a narrative is the presentation of a temporal ordering of incidents laid out in particular manner with the express purpose of representing some larger truth than the mere telling of the events themselves. In other words, and to borrow language from Nussbaum, a narrative possesses a sort of metaphoric element, one that utilizes the temporal organization of events and characterization to achieve its deeper meaning. Narrative is the blending of practical arrangement with value-laden intent.

Many of these thoughts have carried over into our modern conceptions of narrative and have directly shaped the way in which we think about stories. Narrative is a concept that is investigated in numerous academic fields and an exhaustive exploration of all definitions of narrative would be impossible. However, some interesting and basic observations can be made that will help in understanding the domain of narrative transport.

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[66] I want to emphasize once again that I believe history *can* be elevated to higher levels than I might be implying here. Howard Zinn's *The People's History of the United States* strikes me as an immediate example of this.

In her 1991 book *Developing Narrative Structure*, psychologist Allyssa McCabe finds it easier to say what narrative is not rather than what it is.[67] It is not, according to McCabe, exposition, reports, or science. The reason for these exclusions seems to again come down to the temporal nature of narrative. The working definition she uses within her investigations into the structure of narrative is "the oral sequencing of temporally successive events, real or imaginary." Although exposition, reports, and science certainly sequence temporal events, it is in the nature of the larger, overarching message where a narrative is truly found.

Like Aristotle, McCabe zeroes in on the necessity for a beginning, a middle, and an end; not necessarily within the sequencing of events themselves, but in a metaphoric, life imitating sense. Science presents things as they are, and in this sense, they are eternal, possessing all middle with no beginning or end.[68] A fact is as it is, unending, in a way. Narrative, however, imitates life itself with regard to its temporal wholeness. It arranges events in a way that metaphorically connects us to the temporal wholeness of life itself, and in doing so alludes to a deeper, more philosophical whole than the sequencing of temporal events in exposition, reports, or science.

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[67] Developing narrative structure, A McCabe, MC Allyssa, C Peterson - 1991
[68] I've been asked by Eric Schwitzgebel whether a scientific account of the birth, aging, and eventual death of the Sun might count as a narrative on this definition. I have to admit that I think it would. Such an account certainly could lead one to connect with a deeper, more philosophical understanding of life, seeing the life cycle of a star as a metaphorical stand in for her own life. I do not necessarily see the lines between narrative and non-narrative as being hard set and allow, at least on my view, for intermingling between categories.

In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth focuses on "the stories we tell each other as 'imitations of life,' whether or not they in fact claim to depict actual events."[69] Again, we see the tendency to look at narrative as a sort of metaphoric representation or imitation of life itself. As such, Booth sees as his subject

> all narratives, not only novels, short stories, epics, plays, films, and TV dramas but all histories, all satires, all documentaries, all gossip and personal anecdote, all biography and autobiography, all 'storied' ballets and operas, all mimes and puppet shows, all chronicles—indeed, every presentation of a time-ordered or time-related experience that in any way supplements, re-orders, enhances, or interprets unnarrated life.[70]

Here again we see the Aristotelian pairing of temporal ordering with a deeper, philosophical aim.

Turning to the narrative transport literature itself, Tom van Laer et al. "restrict story to mean a storyteller's account of an event or a sequence of events leading to a transition from an initial state to a later state or outcome."[71] On their account, narratives must always include a plot, characters, a climax, and an outcome. Sticking

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[69] Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, 1988

[70] Ibid. Pg. 14

[71] Tom van Laer, Ko de Ruyter, Luca M. Visconti, Martin Wetzels, Journal of Consumer Research, Volume 40, Issue 5, 1 February 2014, Pages 797–817,

with the tradition of adding a metaphoric or value-laden element, they also state that a story must possess, in addition to chronological flow, a narrative framing, or a thematic or symbolic parallel among the events of the story.

Following the tradition set by Aristotle and carried into the modern-day thinking of narrative, we should properly consider any presentation as narrative that has a complete temporal sequencing of events (complete here meaning it contains a full beginning, middle, and end), identifiable characters (which need not be human or even sentient), and a value-laden element that is interpreted by the story receiver (this element need not necessarily be intended by the story producer). This allows for the inclusion of a wide variety of mediums under the umbrella of "narrative."

I take Booth's list above to be a good starting point for the variety of things that might properly be considered narrative, but I in no way mean for that list to be exhaustive. Off-hand, to Booth's list I would include things like photography, paintings, video games, podcasts, and advertisements. For the purposes of our investigation into narrative transport, we can indeed cast quite a large narrative net.

Narrative Transport – An Overview

In 1993, Richard Gerrig was the first researcher to coin the term "narrative transport" to describe the phenomenon of losing oneself in a book or narrative, and it has been heavily studied ever since by researchers in psychology, communications, business, marketing, and various medical fields.[72] The reason for the widespread interest in narrative transport is rooted in the impact transportation appears to have on narrative consumers' attitudes, beliefs, and intentions. As I will soon discuss, the persuasive power of narrative can be, in at least certain circumstances, more powerful than other forms of persuasive techniques, and this makes it tremendously valuable in many contexts.

But before launching into Gerrig's seminal paper on narrative transport, it may be informative to briefly touch upon the historical context out of which his work emerged. Humans, as far as I or anyone else can tell, have always understood the power of narrative. While discussing the proper way to educate the youth in the ideal city, Plato's Socrates asks "shall we carelessly allow the children to hear any old stories, told by just anyone, and to take beliefs into their souls that are for the most part opposite to the ones we think they should hold when they are grown up?"[73] The implication here, of

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[72] Gerrig, Richard J., Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press., 1993
[73] 377b3

course, is that the stories we experience have the ability to shape our very souls, and they do so by altering our beliefs in some way.

Despite this long-running understanding, concrete studies on narrative impact did not begin occurring in the social sciences until the early 20th century. In 1932, psychologist Frederic Bartlett, who happened to be the very first professor of experimental psychology at Cambridge, published a study on memory that involved exposure to narrative.[74] In Bartlett's study, participants read an adaptation of a Native American ghost story and were later asked to retell the story from memory. In nearly every instance, participants' retellings of the story were altered, sometimes greatly, in ways that were dependent upon peculiarities particular to each individual participant. Bartlett's interpretation of the results was that readers engage in an active process of creation when experiencing a narrative, a process that utilizes the reader's own personal history, experiences, and beliefs. Although his study was ostensibly on the nature of memory, Bartlett paved the way for all future research into the psychological experience of reading narratives.

In 1950, literary theorist Walker Gibson theorized that when we read we create within ourselves what he called a "mock reader," or a version of ourselves that takes on

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[74] Bartlett, F. C. (1932). Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology. Cambridge University Press.

a number of beliefs and attitudes that allow us to accept and understand the narrative worlds we experience.[75] As Gibson so eloquently puts it:

> The fact is that every time we open the pages of another piece of writing, we are embarked on a new adventure in which we become a new person—a person controlled and definable and as remote from the chaotic self of daily life as the lover in the sonnet. Subject to the degree of our literary sensibility, we are recreated by the language. We assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away.

This passage is important for a number of reasons. First, it begins the tradition of using travel as a metaphor for what occurs to readers when they are enveloped in a story. Second, it links the travel metaphor with the idea that we engage in a creative project while reading that involves the taking on of new "attitudes and qualities" that help the reader engage with the text.

A simple example of this would be the experience of reading a science-fiction or fantasy novel. In order to properly engage with the narrative world of *Game of* Thrones, for example, we must, or our mock reader must, take on the belief that magic and

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[75] Gibson, Walker. "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers." College English, vol. 11, no. 5, 1950, pp. 265–269

dragons are real, or that Westeros and its many locales are real and thriving places, or else we would be unable to properly understand and appreciate the events and action within the novel. Gibson, even back in 1950, noted that this fact is often exploited by advertisers who count on ad receivers' taking on of certain pro-product attitudes while engaged with an ad in hopes that these attitudes acquired by the mock reader will carry over to the actual reader.

Building upon these and other early attempts to understand the impact that narratives have on those who experience them, Richard Gerrig made the first attempt to conceptualize the phenomenon of narrative transport and to understand the underlying mechanism by which people are changed by their narrative journeys. According to Gerrig, narrative transport consists of the following six elements: 1) someone, namely the "traveler," is transported, 2) the traveler is transported by some means of transportation, 3) transport occurs through an activity performed by the traveler, 4) the traveler is mentally transported some distance from the world of origin, 5) some aspects of the world of origin become inaccessible, 6) the traveler is somewhat changed upon return to the world of origin.

A few points of clarification are warranted that will help with understanding the later research inspired by Gerrig's work. With regard to point 2, "means of transportation" refers to the narrative itself that instigates the transportation and can take any form so long as it can reasonably be thought of as a narrative. This means narrative transport can be triggered by not only novels, but films, spoken-word stories,

and perhaps even things with narrative elements like some video games.[76] From the origins of the study of narrative transport, the definition of "narrative" has been fairly broad and inclusive.

Point 3, that transport occurs through an activity performed by the traveler, is a point that becomes heavily researched in future studies and will be explored in detail in what follows. Element 4, that the traveler is transported some distance from the world of origin, together with element 5, that some aspects of the world or origin become inaccessible, are meant to capture some of phenomenological experiences associated with narrative transport, as well as allude to some of the possible ways in which the changes mentioned in element 6 occur.

Sticking with the metaphor of travel, narrative transportation requires that we move from one place to another (and hopefully back again!). Our starting point, what Gerrig refers to as the "world of origin," is simply the normal world we live in, with all the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions that entails. The world we are transported to is largely referred to as the "narrative world," and operating within that world often requires distancing ourselves from some of the beliefs and attitudes we hold back in the real world. Part of this, I believe, is conceptual and can be captured by the common phenomenon of "suspension of disbelief." We often distance ourselves from our real-world knowledge in order to better enjoy and not criticize a narrative that contains elements that do not coincide with our understanding of the real world. In a sense, we

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[76] Or perhaps a subsection of historical and scientific accounts.

are transported a metaphorical psychological distance from where we began, and our previous set of beliefs becomes, to some degree, inaccessible.

Additionally, the inaccessibility of the world of origin also refers to the more down-to-earth phenomenon whereby those transported into a narrative world simply aren't as aware of what is going on around them in a physical sense. While engrossed in a good book or film, we often fail to notice things that happen around us, oblivious to things we would have easily noticed if we were not so disposed. In this sense, the world of origin becomes inaccessible in both physical and psychological senses.

Of course, Gerrig's 6th element of narrative transport, that travelers are somewhat changed upon return from their narrative journey, is what has driven the large amount of research over the past nearly three decades. But before exploring the consequences of narrative transport, I'll now turn to the prevailing theories on how narrative transport occurs and the mechanisms by which it changes us.

Two Camps: Imagery vs Empathy

Gerrig's 1993 articulation and formalization of narrative transport gave researchers a new way of understanding and researching this long known but rarely studied phenomenon. What made this paper so influential is the way it brought together research and researchers from different fields to focus on one singular point.

At its core, narrative transport is about two main things: first is persuasion, by which I simply mean the process by which someone has an experience or is exposed to information resulting in a change of attitudes, beliefs, and intentions, and second is a study of the nature and psychological impact of narratives.

Until Gerrig and the researchers that came after him, these two areas were largely unconnected. As has been alluded to already, narrative itself has been thoroughly researched and discussed from a wide range of angles. I take Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* to be two of the earliest works that analyze narrative qua narrative, and this trend has carried out, in one form or another, largely uninterrupted straight to today. Similarly, persuasion has also been studied since at least Plato and Aristotle, and much work has been done on the field, particularly within the field of social psychology.[77] However, the persuasive effects of narrative went largely unstudied in a systematic way until roughly the turn of the 21st century. Notable exceptions to this are studies analyzing the effects of television consumption on attitudes and social perception done in the 1990s, though these were more focused on the psychological impact of growing up with heavy television watching and not on the specific ways in which narratives as narratives shift our mental states.[78] [79]

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[77] Brock, Timothy C, and Melanie C. Green. *Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2005
[78] Gerbner, George & Gross, L. & Morgan, Michael & Signorielli, Nancy. (1994). Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective. Michael Morgan.
[79] Shrum, L. & Wyer, Jr & O'Guinn, Thomas. (1998). The Effects of Television Consumption on Social Perceptions: The Use of Priming Procedures to Investigate Psychological Processes. Journal of Consumer Research. 24.

The research into narrative transport has largely branched into two broad categories: one focusing on mental imagery evoked by narrative as the main mechanism for its persuasive effects and another focusing on extending existing theories of rhetorical persuasion to encompass persuasion achieved by the consumption of narratives. There have also been attempts to combine these two approaches into a larger, unified theory of narrative persuasion, but the fact remains that these two approaches remain the bedrocks from which other theories have and continue to emerge within the field.

I'll begin first with the "transportation-imagery model" of narrative transportation put forward by Melanie Green and Timothy Brock.[80] According to this model, consumers of narratives are transported, and subsequently altered, by stories that elicit vivid imagery. For the purposes of their studies, "images are considered mental contents that possess sensory qualities in the absence of external stimuli that provoke the relevant senses or in the absence of appropriate immediate sensory input."[81] For example, an expertly written description of a crisp, cold December morning in Boulder, Colorado might provoke a mental image of the scene that possesses vivid visual qualities, yet it was not created by the external stimuli of snow and mountainsides being perceived by the eyes.

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[80] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock, "In the Mind's Eye: Transportation-Imagery Model of Narrative Persuasion," in *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations.*, ed. Melanie C. Green, Jeffrey J. Strange, and Timothy C. Brock, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002, 315–41.

[81] Ibid. Pg. 321

It is largely by way of these images, Green and Brock contend, that narratives are able to transport their readers and ultimately change them in the process. The idea is that when a narrative is able to elicit powerful imagery within a consumer, those images "take on new meaning as a result of their links with the experience of entering the narrative world."[82] By temporarily holding as true the images of events, places, people, and situations given by the narrative, the consumer is altered in various ways (these ways will be investigated more thoroughly below). Green and Brock have found in multiple studies that self-reports of vivid imagery correlate strongly with the degree of narrative transport, and that narrative transport correlates strongly with various story-consistent changes in beliefs, intentions, and affect.[83]

Although Green and Brock emphasize the importance of visual imagery and hold its presence as the primary indicator of narrative transportation and persuasion, they do not rule out the possibility of other modalities of mental imagery playing a role in the process, nor do they necessary require visual imagery be present. Rather, they mean for "imagery" to stand in for the whole host of ways we might phenomenologically experience transportation into a narrative world.[84] There are many ways in which people experience narratives, including memories, pure cognitive associations, and a

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[82] Ibid. Pg. 323
[83] For a more thorough explanation of how transportation is empirically assessed please see Green and Brock 2000, and 2002.
[84] See Green and Brock 2002 end note #1 for their full explanation of this idea. In general, they mean to accommodate any way in which a person might represent the narrative to themselves, with or without visual imagery.

variety of other mental representations. In fact, according to recent studies done by Alan Moore on the phenomenology of reading, 16% of participants report never having visual imagery when they read and in some experimental conditions only 46% of participants reported visual imagery after being asked to report their experiences while reading a particular text.[85] To add my own anecdotal evidence, I also rarely experience visual imagery when I read.

Although Green and Brock wish to hold the primacy of visual imagery in their theory, I take the word "imagery" in the "transportation-imagery model" to be, perhaps fittingly, used largely metaphorically. Unlike more tradition models of rhetorical persuasion that rely on cognitive elaboration, the transportation-imagery model tries to capture the non-intentional manner in which we engage with narratives and find ourselves with altered beliefs and attitudes as a result.[86] Though visual imagery is perhaps the most powerful and frequent mode of engagement with narrative that results in transportation, I take Green and Brock to be using the term "imagery" to refer to a much wider array of phenomenological experiences, ones that all share the quality of absorbing us and carrying away our mental attention. There are many ways a person might imagine the scenes depicted in a narrative, and this view is meant to capture the variety of those ways.

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[85] Moore, Alan (2017), "The Experience of Reading" Ph.D. dissertation
[86] Petty R.E., Cacioppo J.T. (1986) The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. In: Communication and Persuasion. Springer Series in Social Psychology. Springer, New York, NY

What's important for the transportation-imagery model is that a narrative

consumer's powerful, phenomenologically felt experiences of a narrative create a

juxtaposition with pre-transportation beliefs, attitudes, and intentions in such a way as

to affect them. This is seen as a distinct mental process from those responsible for other

sorts of non-narrative persuasion, and is what Green and Brock believe is responsible for

the changes experienced by individuals who experience narrative transportation.

The second main narrative transport camp, the "extended elaboration likelihood

model," was pioneered by Michael Slater and Donna Rouner and focuses more on

empathy and identification with narrative characters than imagery.[87] Whereas Green

and Brock's transportation-imagery model emerged from an intuitive approach to

analyzing the phenomenological experience of being immersed in a story, Slater and

Rouner developed their approach by extending the elaboration likelihood model (ELM)

used by researchers studying rhetorical forms persuasion. The idea here is to view

narrative persuasion as a species of rhetorical persuasion and to use conceptual tools

learned in research of the latter to gain insights into researching the former. By taking

elements of ELM and extending them to encompass narrative, Slater and Rouner hope

to zero in on the particular psychological mechanisms at play in narrative transport.

According to ELM, a person's likelihood to engage with and be persuaded by an

argument is dependent on the degree the argument coincides with the person's self-

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[87] Slater, Michael D., and Donna Rouner (2002), "Entertainment- Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion," *Communication Theory*, 2002, 173–91.

interest.[88] Breaking it down further, "elaboration" here refers to the degree to which a person carefully thinks about an issue presented to them. The more relevant that issue is to the individual, meaning how much that issue aligns with the interests of the person, the more the likelihood of elaboration on that topic increases.[89] Higher levels of elaboration have been shown to result in higher levels of issue-related belief and attitude change due to higher levels of cognitive engagement.[90] In short, the more a persuasive text deals with issues that align with a person's self-interest, the more careful mental consideration (elaboration) that person will give the issue, and the more mental consideration an issue is given, the higher the probability that person will experience issue-consistent belief and attitude changes.

According to Petty and Cacioppo, attitude changes brought about by ELM are the result of one of two different mental processing channels, making ELM what is known as a "dual process theory."[91] The primary, or central route, of persuasion is, as outlined above, when a person carefully considers the merits of an argument, weighing the pros and cons, scrutinizing and challenging its premises, and ultimately making a fully

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[88] Brock, Timothy C., and Melanie C. Green. Persuasion: Psychological Insights and Perspectives. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.

[89] Here, as is the case within the literature, "interests" and "self-interest" are used rather interchangeably. Even though someone might be interested in something that is not, strictly speaking, within their self-interest, the fact that a narrative deals with something a person is interested in makes it relevant to their self-interest. The assumption here is that people have a self-interest in engaging with material they are interested in, and thus the two often conflate appropriately.

[90] Petty, R E., & Cacioppo, 1. T. (1984). The effects of involvement on responses to argument quantity and quality: Central and peripheral routes to persuasion. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 46, 69-81.

[91] Petty R.E., Cacioppo J.T. (1986) The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. In: Communication and Persuasion. Springer Series in Social Psychology. Springer, New York, NY

considered decision that alters one's beliefs. The secondary, or peripheral route, of persuasion is accomplished when an individual responds to attractive cues within the context and presentation of the argument, and these cues trigger shifts in attitudes and beliefs. These cues could be things like the perceived credibility of the argument giver, number of sources, appeal of packaging, or even positive or negative emotional valance.[92]

The basic idea behind ELM is that people are motivated by the desire to hold correct attitudes and beliefs, particularly about the issues and topics that are most relevant to a person's interests. Because of this, we come to have changed attitudes as a result of coming into contact with rhetoric we find relevant and withstands scrutiny, in the case of central processing, or attractive, in the case of peripheral processing.[93]

However, narratives, or at least good ones, do not generally have overt messages or arguments that the consumer can evaluate and judge to be in or out of line with her interests. In fact, Slater and Rouner found that if the persuasive content is too obvious or featured too prominently, it actually inhibits transportation while also failing to persuade through rhetorical means.[94] Therefore, if narrative transport is to utilize the same or similar processes to achieve persuasion as rhetoric, then we need a different explanation than ELM can offer for how this would occur.

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[92] Ibid. Pg. 3.
[93] Note that I am referring just to positive attitude changes for simplicity of language here, but ELM can account for both positive and negative attitude changes.
[94] Slater, Michael D., and Donna Rouner, "Entertainment- Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion," *Communication Theory*, 2002, 183-84

Slater and Rouner found this explanation by analyzing the motivations people have for engaging with narratives in the first place. To extend ELM to cover the persuasion achieved by narrative, Slater and Rouner needed to identify the interests or needs that engaging with narrative satisfies. By determining the degree to which narrative satisfies a story receiver's self-interest, we can then explain how the processes involved in ELM are triggered and perhaps how they operate.

In studies, Slater and Rouner were able to determine that there is a correlation between the degree to which a consumer either identifies or empathizes with a narrative's characters or plot and the degree that person's attitudes and beliefs changed to mirror those expressed in the story.[95] The idea is roughly this: according to ELM, the more a text coincides with a consumer's self-interest the more that consumer will be mentally engaged with that text, and thus, if the text is persuasive, will be more likely to have her attitudes and beliefs changed by the text.[96] There are a number of reasons people engage with narratives and no theory could likely capture all of them. However, Slater argues that many people have desires for social relationships and experiences, which drive those people to engage with narratives for vicarious fulfillment of these desires. Additionally, some individuals desire basic arousal or diversion/escapism, in which case engagement will depend upon interest in the specific genre or plot or the

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[95]Ibid.

[96] "Text" here means any rhetorical language with persuasive content.

narrative.[97] The more these self-interested desires are satisfied by a narrative, the more

cognitive engagement will occur.[98] This increased cognitive engagement results in higher

degrees of transportation, which in turn results in more story-consistent changes once

the consumer returns from her narrative journey. The more connected a consumer is to

the story's characters and/or plot, the more likely she is to take on board the beliefs,

attitudes, and values presented by and endorsed by that character, at least

temporarily.[99]

Using this framework, Slater and Rouner created what they call the "Extended

Elaboration Likelihood Model" (EELM) of narrative persuasion. An important difference

for the EELM over the ELM, however, is the shift from what the ELM calls central

processing to what the authors call a "deeper processing of a different kind."[100] As they

point out, studies indicate a higher average degree of emotional engagement with

narratives than with rhetoric, making the processing something more like ELM's

peripheral route than the central route. On this view, emotional engagement with a

narrative's characters and plot, rather than the vividness of narrative imagery, is the

driving factor of narrative transport.

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[97] Slater, Michael. (2006). Persuasion Processes Across Receiver Goals and Message Genres. Communication Theory. 7. 125 - 148.

[98] Slater actually identifies six "receiver goals" related to the motivation to consume narrative. The two referenced in this paragraph are presented as the two most relevant to the discussion at hand.

[99] Ibid. Pg. 177

[100] Ibid. Pg. 187

A recent meta study of the literature on narrative transport done by Tom van

Laer et al. showed that most researches now favor views that utilize both imagery and

emotional identification as contributors to increased narrative transport.[101] Based on

the research conducted in these two camps, it appears that narrative transportation

correlates both with vivid imagery and with empathy/emotionality via identification

with characters and plot. In light of this, a broader approach to narrative transport is

warranted and in what follows I will layout the research done on the various moderators

of transport that cut across the two camps discussed above.

Moderators of Narrative Transport

Since Green and Brock's influential 2000 research on narrative transport, many

studies have been done to determine what factors act as moderators for the

phenomenon.[102] These moderators can generally be broken down into two categories:

moderators having to do with the story receiver and moderators having to do with the

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[101] van Laer, Tom et al.. "The Extended Transportation-imagery Model: A Meta-analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation". *Journal of Consumer Research* 40.5 (2014): 797–817.
[102] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79 (5), 701– 21

story itself or its presentation. None of these elements alone are responsible for the inducement of Narrative transport, but each has been shown to play some role in the degree to which a person is transported and the subsequent degree of affective and cognitive changes.

Receiver-Based Moderators

Following Gerrig's 1993 assertion that narrative transportation requires activity on the part of the story receiver, researchers have discovered a number of factors that influence that activity. Specifically, these factors influence the relationship between exposure to a narrative and the degree of narrative transportation experienced by the story receiver.

To begin, it turns out that some people are simply more "transportable" than others. This, at least intuitively, makes sense. Anecdotally, I have had students in my Summer "Philosophy through Film" courses report wildly varying degrees of experienced narrative transport, with some students reporting more chronic transportation than others. Most of us likely know individuals who are able to more or less easily lose themselves in a story, be it though more easily being able to imagine the depicted scenes or identify with relatable characters.

Supporting these personal observations, Dal Cin, Zanna, and Fong found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that general transportability did in fact predict higher levels of

narrative transportation during exposure to individual narratives.[103] To test this, the

researchers developed a general transportability scale that aimed to score the general

ease with which participants experienced transportation in the past, imagined the

events of stories and films, identified with characters, and suspended their disbelief

when engaging with narratives. Effectively, transportability, thought of as a character

trait, "reliably predicts the extent to which participants are transported by a particular

story."[104] Subsequently, Bilandzic and Busselle also found that general transportability is

a good predictor of transportation during individual exposures to narrative in a wide

variety of genres[105], and Mazzocco et al. found that transportability predicted more

narrative persuasion after exposure to narratives but not when exposed to arguments

about the same subject matter.[106] This suggests that transportability is a reliable

moderator of narrative transport and persuasion specifically, as opposed to

persuadability generally.[107]

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[103] Dal Cin, S., Zanna, M. P., & Fong, G. T. (2004). Narrative Persuasion and Overcoming Resistance. In E. S. Knowles & J. A. Linn (Eds.), *Resistance and persuasion* (p. 175–191). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
[104] Ibed. Pg. 186
[105] Bilandzic, H. and Busselle, R.W. (2008), Transportation and Transportability in the Cultivation of Genre-Consistent Attitudes and Estimates. Journal of Communication, 58: 508-529
[106] Mazzocco, Philip & Green, Melanie & Sasota, Jo & Jones, Norman. (2010). This Story Is Not for Everyone: Transportability and Narrative Persuasion. Social Psychological and Personality Science.
[107] It is an open question what is actually going on with "transportability." Methodologically, these studies use self-report to measure both transportation and transportability, so there is likely a lot of contamination between measures. However, the fact does remain that the self-reported transportability of participants predicts transportation, which in turn predicts higher levels of belief and attitude shifts. Thus, there does seem to still be some credibility to these findings.

Prior knowledge of the subject matter has also been identified as a strong

receiver-side moderator of narrative transport. In a 2004 study, Melanie Green had

participants read a narrative about a homosexual man attending his fraternity's reunion

party.[108] Participants who reported having close friends or family members who were

homosexual experienced higher levels of narrative transport than those who did not

have such relationships. Similarly, participants who indicated more experience with

Greek life in the United States also experienced higher levels of transport than those

with lower levels of Greek life knowledge. Green also noted that participants who were

themselves members or former members of a fraternity or sorority experienced even

higher levels of narrative transport, but that there were not enough participants

meeting this criterion for sufficient statistical power.

Green also tested whether repeat exposure to narratives and films would have

an effect on the felt narrative transport of participants.[109] In one study, adult movie

goers were given surveys after watching the film *Harry Potter and the Chamber of

Secrets* at a movie theatre. In addition to questions regarding demographic as well as a

transportation scale, participants were asked if they had read the book the film was

based on prior to watching the film. Green found that those who had read the book

before hand experienced more narrative transport than those who had only seen the

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[108] Melanie C. Green (2004) Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism, Discourse Processes, 38:2, 247-266
[109] Melanie C. Green, Sheryl Kass, Jana Carrey, Benjamin Herzig, Ryan Feeney & John Sabini (2008) Transportation Across Media: Repeated Exposure to Print and Film, Media Psychology, 11:4, 512-539

film, lending further support to the claim that prior knowledge of subject matter affects narrative transportation. Further studies were done with less well-known narratives to avoid confounding factors involving fandom.

An interesting study in the field of Product Innovation Management also reinforces the claim that prior knowledge acts as a moderator of narrative transport. Companies often rely on consumer input during the development of new products, and this input becomes more valuable when the new products being developed are radically different from existing products on the market due to the fact that novel product ideas become more difficult to come by. In a 2017 study, Schweitzer and Van den Hende found that participants who were given narrative pitches for radically new products generated more novel ideas than those given non-narrative pitches.[110] Furthermore, participants with some prior knowledge of the pitched product domain experienced higher levels of narrative transport and generated more novel ideas. The author's reasoning is that higher levels of narrative transport correlates with more vivid imagery of the pitched product, which makes the generation of novel ideas easier. It seems that more familiarity with the subject at hand increases a person's ability to imagine or perhaps identify with a narrative, resulting in higher transportation.

Prior knowledge of a text might be a double-edged sword, however. In a 2013 study on learning errors and misinformation, Fazio et al. found that prior knowledge of

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[110] Schweitzer, F., & Van den Hende, E. A. (2017). Drivers and Consequences of Narrative Transportation: Understanding the Role of Stories and Domain-Specific Skills in Improving Radically New Products. *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *34*(1), 101–118.

the subject of a fact-based narrative (e.g. in a history text) did not safeguard participants

from acquiring misinformation embedded within the narrative.[111] According to the

authors, "errors can enter the knowledge base even when learners have the knowledge

necessary to catch the errors." An explanation for this alarming finding could be that

prior knowledge of a subject increases rates of narrative transportation, which in turn

increases rates of story-consistent belief change and attitudes. I will return to this topic

below.

Multiple researchers have found that increased attention paid to a narrative

results in higher levels of narrative transport. When comparing the persuasive effects of

difficult-to-process rhetorical arguments with the effects of difficult-to-process

narratives with similar content, Nielsen and Escalas found that text difficulty resulted in

higher levels of concentration which subsequently resulted in higher levels of

transportation while reading the narratives.[112] This resulted in higher levels of story-

consistent belief and attitude shifts than those who read the difficult rhetorical

argument. It appears that attention and concentration may cause narrative receivers to

"work harder" to understand and imagine the story, which results in more

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[111] Fazio, L.K., Barber, S.J., Rajaram, S., Ornstein, P.A., & Marsh, E. (2013). Creating illusions of knowledge: learning errors that contradict prior knowledge. *Journal of experimental psychology. General, 142 1*, 1-5 .

[112] Nielsen, Jesper & Escalas, Jennifer. (2010). Easier is not always better: The moderating role of processing type on preference fluency. Journal of Consumer Psychology - J CONSUM PSYCHOL. 20. 295-305.

transportation, whereas more attention paid to a rhetorical argument increases critical engagement and counterarguing with the presented argument.

Similarly, Polichak and Gerrig found that more active engagement in a narrative, judged by the generation of what they call "participatory responses" (p-responses), results in higher levels of narrative transport.[113] P-responses are non-verbalized mental exclamations the likes of "get up!" or "don't open that door!", responses that one might actually yell if you were an actual participant at a boxing match or actually observing the events depicted in a horror film. Polichak and Gerrig argue that a higher frequency of p-responses indicates a higher degree of attention and engagement with a narrative. It is this attention that increases the story receiver activity that results in transportation and its subsequent effects.

Although they hesitate to make the concrete conclusion, Green et al. suggest that concentration may correlate with narrative transportation based on their study of repeat exposure to narratives.[114] The authors theorize that the effects attention and concentration have on narrative transport may be related to an individuals need for cognition. Those with higher levels of need for cognition may have their needs met by more difficult texts which results in higher levels of transportation. Similarly, individuals

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[113] Polichak, J. W., & Gerrig, R. J. (2002). "Get up and win!": Participatory responses to narrative. In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations* (p. 71–95).
[114] Melanie C. Green, Sheryl Kass, Jana Carrey, Benjamin Herzig, Ryan Feeney & John Sabini (2008) Transportation Across Media: Repeated Exposure to Print and Film, Media Psychology, 11:4, 512-539

with lower levels of need for cognition might have their needs met by texts and films

with lower difficulty. They conclude that more research needs to be done in this area.

Related to the factor of attention is distraction. Green and Brock found that

assigning participants tasks that distracted them from careful engagement with a

narrative (for example, asking participants to look for and note difficult words or

grammar mistakes) resulted in lower levels of transportation.[115] Zwarun and Hall

conducted a study in which some participants were asked to read a narrative in a low-

distraction environment while others read the narrative in a high-distraction

environment. Participants in the high-distraction environment were interrupted

multiple times by researchers and were placed in a noisy room with other participants

all viewing films playing at different points. Low-distraction participants were not

interrupted and were isolated, listening to the film audio on headphones. Participants in

the low-distraction condition experienced much more narrative transport.[116] Chingching

Chang also found that study participants who were placed under a cognitive load while

reading narratives experienced lower levels of narrative transport.[117]

A number of demographic factors have also been suggested to have an influence

on narrative transport, but the evidence here is less clear. With regard to gender, Van

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[115] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79 (5), 701– 21
[116] Zwarun, L., & Hall, A. (2012). Narrative persuasion, transportation, and the role of need for cognition in online viewing of fantastical films. *Media Psychology*, *15*(3), 327–355
[117] Chang, Chingching (2009), "'Being Hooked' by Editorial Content: The Implications for Processing Narrative Advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, 38 (1), 21–33

Laer et al. finds in a meta-analysis that women experience much more narrative transport than men.[118] However, I believe a more careful analysis of the data suggests that this is likely not the case, or at least more complicated. Green and Brock found in some studies that women experienced more transport than men, while many of their other studies found no difference between men and women.[119] Similarly, Slater and Rouner came to conflicting results, with some studies showing women experiencing more transport and others showing that men and women experience the same levels.[120] Perhaps more interesting is the fact that Slater and Rouner point out that their studies in which women were transported more than men involved narratives that might be traditionally seen as more interesting to women, for example, a narrative involving a date night from a women's perspective. Similarly, the studies in which Green and Brock found a gender difference involved a story told from the perspective of a woman in which another woman is brutally murdered. Numerous other researchers also mention collecting demographic data on gender yet make no mention of a difference in discussions of the results. This leads me to believe that at best there may be a slight tendency for women to be more transportable, but that the found differences might be

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[118] van Laer, Tom et al.. "The Extended Transportation-imagery Model: A Meta-analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation". *Journal of Consumer Research* 40.5 (2014): 797–817.

[119] Three out of four of the studies published in Green and Brock 2000 found a gender difference, while Green and Brock 2002 and Green 2004 found no difference.

[120] Slater, Michael D., and Donna Rouner, "Entertainment- Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion," *Communication Theory*, 2002, 183-84

more a result of increased attention and/or familiarity with story subject matter, as discussed in more detail above.[121]

Van Laer et al. also report that higher education has a small effect on narrative transport.[122] Their explanation for this is that "highly educated people read more and thus are likely to be better at inference making." Again, I think that perhaps prior knowledge and attention are likely mediators of this effect. With regard to age, researchers have found no appreciable difference in experienced levels of narrative transportation. However, this could be due to a lack of age range in participant pools, as many researchers are recruiting subjects from university psychology courses and general student populations.

Story-Based Moderators

Researchers have also identified a host of story-based moderators of narrative transport. Just as there are elements of the story receiver herself that make the experience of narrative transport more or less likely, so too are there elements of the story, both in its construction and how it is presented, that affect the degree of narrative transport experienced by the story receiver.

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[121] It is interesting to note, however, that to my knowledge there have been no studies that have found men to experience more narrative transportation than women. As noted, there may be a slight tendency here, but I suspect it might be mediated by other factors.

[122] van Laer, Tom et al.. "The Extended Transportation-imagery Model: A Meta-analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation". *Journal of Consumer Research* 40.5 (2014): Pg. 807

Narrative quality or artistry is the most difficult of the story-based moderators to define but is largely considered an important moderator of transport. In his original 1993 paper, Gerrig theorized that any narrative, regardless of quality, might facilitate transportation, but that higher artistry would likely result in higher levels of narrative absorption. Sticking with his metaphor of travel, Gerrig quipped that "a pickup truck isn't as elegant as a Cadillac, but it will still get us to Texas."[123] Green found that national bestsellers and classic, critically acclaimed stories and short stories triggered more transportation than narratives written by researchers for the purposes of their studies, but also found, consistent with Gerrig, that even basic narratives triggered some transport.[124] Many researchers, like Mazzocco et al. and Slater, follow this research and simply use the level of triggered narrative transportation as a method of determining narrative quality, effectively equating quality with transportability. Although to my knowledge no researcher has clearly defined "quality" when it refers to texts and their ability to create narrative transport, the concept of text quality remains popular within the literature.

Plot is an essential element of stories and has been identified as a crucial moderator of narrative transport. In particular, the degree to which people can imagine the events in a story taking place appears to be a key factor in determining how much

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[123] Gerrig, Richard J., Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press., 1993. Pg. 12

[124] Melanie C. Green (2004) Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism, Discourse Processes, 38:2, 249.

narrative transport an individual experiences. The traditional transportation scale

created by Green and Brock in 2000 that is widely used by transportation researchers

itself uses plot imagery as a measure of narrative transport. In addition to general

imagery questions like "I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the

narrative" and "while I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it

taking place", specific questions pertaining to events taking place in the very narrative

being read are often included in the transportation scale.[125] As discussed above, the

transportation-imagery model of narrative transportation takes the imaginability of plot

as a requirement for transportation at all. Given that plot is a necessary element of

narrative itself, this is unsurprising.

Relatedly, the identifiability of characters is also a key moderator of narrative

transport. Slater and Rouner originally identified fulfillment of the emotional needs of

the story receiver as a primary motivator for cognitive elaboration and subsequent

transportation. Chief among those emotional needs is the desire for vicarious

socialization via identification with story characters.[126] This has been confirmed in

multiple subsequent studies. For example, Escalas and Stern found that increased

sympathy and empathy responses to television dramas predicted higher rates of story-

[125] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79 (5), 704
[126] Slater, Michael D., and Donna Rouner, "Entertainment- Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion," *Communication Theory*, 2002,

consistent attitude shifts.[127] Similarly, Escalas, Moore, and Britton (in the wonderfully

titled "Fishing for Feelings? Hooking Viewers Helps!") found that ads with more

identifiable characters resulted in participants experiencing more narrative transport, or

what they refer to as "being hooked" by the ad.[128] Also, although Green emphasizes the

role of imagery in the triggering of narrative transportation, she does acknowledge the

role of identifiable characters, particularly when the identification of a character ties

into the prior knowledge of the story receiver.[129]

Verisimilitude, or perceived story realism, has also been identified as a strong

moderator for narrative transport. Interestingly, verisimilitude is not affected by

whether a story is itself true or not. Green and Brock ran conditions in their initial 2000

studies in which participants were told either that the narratives they read were true or

fiction, resulting in no difference in narrative transport. Additionally, Green and

Donahue found that participants experienced the same level of story-consistent belief

shift regardless of whether they were told a story was truth of fiction. Shockingly, these

belief shifts persisted even if participants were first told the story was true and then

later told the author of the story intentionally lied about the events within the

[127] Jennifer Edson Escalas, Barbara B. Stern, Sympathy and Empathy: Emotional
Responses to Advertising Dramas, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 29, Issue 4,
March 2003, Pages 566–578,
[128] Escalas, Jennifer Edson, Marian Chapman Moore, and Julie Edell Britton (2004), "Fishing for
Feelings? Hooking Viewers Helps!" Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14 (1-2), 105-114.
[129] Melanie C. Green (2004) Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge
and Perceived Realism, Discourse Processes, 38:2, 257

narrative.[130] These findings are consistent with "debriefing" style studies that have

found beliefs persist in the face of countervailing evidence.[131]

Rather than be about the veracity of the content of a narrative, verisimilitude is

more concerned with how reasonable the story receiver finds the characters, their

actions, and the events depicted within the narrative. For example, verisimilitude might

not be impacted when reading a science fiction novel depicting creatures or situations

that do not actually exist, but it might be impacted if those characters act in

unbelievable ways or if the events unfold in an illogical or unbelievable way. In other

words, verisimilitude is about whether a narrative "makes sense" to the story receiver,

and not necessarily whether the content of the narrative lines-up with reality. As I like to

put it, a story can be as unrealistic as it wants so long as it follows its own rules.

With that in mind, Green found a strong connection between perceived realism

and transportation.[132] It's worth noting here that it is unclear whether there is a causal

relationship here, or if there is one, which direction it goes. Brusselle and Bilandzic, in a

meta-study of psychological literature on narrative processing, find that story

incoherence suppresses narrative transport.[133] In general, the more a person finds a

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[130] Melanie C. Green & John K. Donahue (2011) Persistence of Belief Change in the Face of Deception: The Effect of Factual Stories Revealed to Be False, Media Psychology, 14:3, 312-331

[131] Shultz, T. R., Katz, J., & Lepper, M. (2001). Clinging to Beliefs: A Constraint-satisfaction Model. Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society, 928-933.

[132] Melanie C. Green (2004) Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism, Discourse Processes, 38:2, 247-266

[133] Busselle, Rick & Bilandzic, Helena. (2008). Fictionality and Perceived Realism in Experiencing Stories: A Model of Narrative Comprehension and Engagement. Communication Theory. 18. 255 - 280.

story believable in the sense described above, the more likely that person is to be more transported by the narrative.

A recent meta-analysis of studies done on narratives in digital contexts (blogs, on-line reviews, etc.) shows that certain aspects of the presentation of narratives might also moderate narrative transport.[134] Van Laer et al. found that reading user-generated narratives, as opposed to professionally created narratives, resulted in higher degrees of transport. They also found that participants who receive stories alone, versus in groups, experienced more transportation. Finally, they found that individuals who did not perceive persuasive intent when exposed to narrative ads experienced higher levels of transportation. These findings suggest that the way in which a narrative is presented may also be a strong moderator of narrative transport.

Consequences of Narrative Transport

As has been alluded to throughout this dissertation, the process of being transported by a narrative comes along with a number of cognitive and emotional changes. The degree to which a person is transported is a predictor for changes in story-consistent beliefs, attitudes, and intentions, as well certain types of affective and

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[134] van Laer, Tom and Feiereisen, Stephanie and Visconti, Luca M., Storytelling in the Digital Era: A Meta-Analysis of Relevant Moderators of the Narrative Transportation Effect (2019). Journal of Business Research, 96(1), 135-146

cognitive responses. I will now briefly discuss these changes and some of their

experimental support.

The more a person experiences narrative transport, the more her beliefs shift to

coincide with information or themes presented within the narrative. Beginning with

Green and Brock's initial 2000 study, participants who were highly transported by

narratives describing the murder of an innocent person by an escaped psychiatric

patient reported beliefs about both violence and psychiatric patient treatment that

were more consistent with those implied in the story.[135] Green also found that

participants exhibited more story-consistent beliefs after reading narratives about a

homosexual man attending a fraternity reunion party.[136] Numerous researchers in other

fields have found that presenting information in narrative form to participants results in

more story-consistent beliefs. For example, Williams et al. found that participants

exposed to stories with anti-smoking messages exhibited more anti-smoking beliefs

than those presented anti-smoking information in non-narrative form.[137]

Shifts in belief are the most researched consequence of narrative transport and

the studies are too numerous to cite in full here. However, a recent meta-analysis of

peer-reviewed papers studying the persuasive influence of narratives found a positive

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[135] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), 706
[136] Melanie C. Green (2004)
[137] Williams, J. H., Green, M. C., Kohler, C., Allison, J. J., & Houston, T. K. (2011). Stories to communicate risks about tobacco: Development of a brief scale to measure transportation into a video story – The ACCE Project. *Health Education Journal*, *70*(2), 184–191.

influence between narrative transport and story-consistent belief change in 37

papers.[138]

A shift in pro-narrative attitudes and affective responses are also known

consequences of narrative transport. By "attitude" here I mean a general evaluation of

the content of the exposed narrative. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this effect has been

heavily researched by those with an eye towards marketing. Jennifer Escalas has found

that the degree to which consumers are transported by advertisements featuring

running shoes directly correlates to the degree of positive or "upbeat" feelings the ad

generates.[139] Similarly, ChingChing Chang found that individuals transported by

narrative advertisements generated more positive feelings towards the brand than

those exposed to argument-based advertising.[140] In general, the more a person is

transported, the more the narrative impacts the story receiver's positive emotions

towards the story elements and characters.[141] Braddock and Dillard's meta-analysis

found a positive relationship between transportation and attitude in 40 peer-reviewed

papers.

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[138] Kurt Braddock & James Price Dillard (2016) Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, Communication Monographs, 83:4, 446-467

[139] Escalas, Jennifer Edson, Marian Chapman Moore, and Julie Edell Britton (2004), "Fishing for Feelings? Hooking Viewers Helps!" Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14, 105–14

[140] Chang, Chingching (2009), "'Being Hooked' by Editorial Content: The Implications for Processing Narrative Advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, 38 (1), 21–33

[141] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), 706-705

Next to shifts in belief, fewer critical thoughts is likely the most universally found effect within the transport literature. From the very first studies done on transport by Green and Slater on forward, researchers have consistently found that consumers become less critical and generally less cognitively opposed to narratives the more the consumers are transported. For example, Green and Brock utilize a technique they call "Pinocchio Circling" in which participants are instructed to physically circle any part of the narrative that they perceive to be false notes, or something in the story that contradicts a fact or does not make sense. Individuals who experience more narrative transport identify fewer false notes in the text than those experiencing lower levels of transportation. Additionally, participants presented with stories that are designed to inhibit transport are more likely to question elements of the story, whereas those heavily transported consistently accept stories as presented and report fewer thoughts challenging elements of the narrative in free response thought-listings.[142]

Finally, researchers have found that transported individuals are more likely to form story consistent intentions. Although quite a bit of research in this area also revolves around marketing, a pleasantly large amount of research has been done on the role of narrative in health education and its ability to affect the formation of pro-health intentions. Sally Dunlop et al. found that individuals transported by narrative based anti-cancer or anti-smoking messages were more likely to report intentions to take measures

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[142] Ibid.

to protect their skin or stop smoking, respectively.[143] Similarly, Matthew Kreuter et al.

found that cancer patients exposed to narrative based information were more likely to

set intentions to carryout pro-health behavior than those exposed to fact based

information.[144] Braddock and Dillard's meta-analysis found a positive relationship

between transportation and story-consistent intentions in 28 peer-reviewed studies.

Literary Imagination vs Literary Theory of Mind

With a better understanding of what narrative transport and its effects are, I

would like to briefly revisit some points from chapter one before moving to my own

research conducted in chapter 3. Looking at the consequences of narrative transport

together as a group, one major theme begins to develop. Although the effects range

from affective to cognitive, all the changes tend towards consistency with the

narrative's content. Transportation results in higher affective response, but the valence

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[143] Dunlop, Sally M., Melanie Wakefield, and Yoshihisa Kashima (2010), "Pathways to Persuasion: Cognitive and Experiential Responses to Health-Promoting Mass Media Messages," *Communication Research*, 37 (1), 133–64.

[144] Kreuter, Matthew W., Melanie C. Green, Joseph N. Cappella, Michael D. Slater, Meg E. Wise, Doug Storey, Eddie M. Clark, Daniel J. O'Keefe, Deborah O. Erwin, Kathleen Holmes, Leslie J. Hinyard, Thomas Houston, and Sabra Woolley. (2007) "Narrative Communication in Cancer Prevention and Control: A Framework to Guide Research and Application." Annals of Behavioral Medicine Ann. Behav. Med. 33.3: 221-35.

of that affective response is dependent upon the content of the particular narrative. Escalas found that consumers presented with narrative ads had higher feelings of being upbeat, but this is most likely the result of the ads portraying energetic runners happily conquering the day with their favorite running shoe, and not a result of transportation itself. Chingching Chang also found higher levels of positive affective response, but this was only after reading a narrative about a woman going through a positive, life-changing experience. The take home from the empirical evidence is not that narrative transport increases positive affect, but that narrative transport increases story-consistent affective response.

Similarly, the drop in critical thoughts towards a narrative also show a tendency for transported individuals to "fall in line" with the content of the narrative. To not challenge something is, at least implicitly, to accept it as true, if only temporarily. The form of the narrative may contribute to transportation, but once transported, an individual is much more likely to agree with what is being presented. Perhaps the most striking example of this is 2011 study by Green and Donahue mentioned above that found the effects of narrative transport persisted even when participants were told the narrative they experienced was an outright, motivated lie. People seem to fall in line with the content of a narrative, and then have difficulty making their way back to the state they were in before exposure to the narrative.

We repeatedly see the same thing with changes in belief and intention. The more someone is transported the more likely they are to change their beliefs and

intentions to be in line with the content of the narrative. This effect even holds

regardless of whether the consumer of a narrative believes the story is true or not. In

their "murder at the mall" experiment, Green and Brock found that telling participants

the story was true or fictional had no bearing on whether transported individuals'

beliefs changed to coincide with those implied in the narrative. One can only conclude

from this that, given the right set of conditions resulting in high levels of transport,

narratives have the power to influence our beliefs and intentions regardless of what the

actual content of the narratives are.

Although few studies have been done to test the effectiveness of what we might

call narratives with "harmful" content (and for good reason, the human research board

process would be a nightmare!), we do see glimpses of what this might look like in some

select studies. The most jarring example is perhaps again the finding discussed above

that changes in belief and intention persist despite the person being informed that they

were deceived. It appears that so long as someone can get their narrative "hooks" into

you, to borrow a term from Jennifer Escalas, then the work, damaging or beneficial, has

already been done, regardless of what the person finds out later. Similarly, Dal Cin et al.

found that people who are exposed to narratives that positively depict smokers have

more favorable attitudes towards both smoking and smokers.[145]

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[145] Dal Cin, S., Zanna, M. P., & Fong, G. T. (2004). Narrative Persuasion and Overcoming Resistance. In E. S. Knowles & J. A. Linn (Eds.), *Resistance and persuasion* Pg. 187

This, perhaps, comes as no surprise to anyone. After all, we tend to shelter our children from films, music, video games, and stories that depict world views we see as dangerous or that we otherwise disagree with. That narratives have an impact on us is something we all implicitly take for granted, and the research on narrative transportation bears that out. Narrative is a powerful tool, it has the ability to change our minds, to sway our attitudes, to alter our emotions, and to influence the things we intend to do. But what the research shows time and time again is that the direction these changes go is completely dependent upon what the narrative says. The narrative form of the text is what makes these changes possible, but the direction of the change is fully reliant on the narrative's content.

And therein lies the problem for Nussbaum's view. The empirical research vindicates much of what Nussbaum claims with regard to the powerful ability narratives have to change us, but it points towards a much larger, and potentially troubling, role for narrative content. For Nussbaum, the very form of narrative triggers in us an appreciation of humanity that is beneficial for civil life, an appreciation that is only amplified when content is added in. The research, however, points towards a different story. The very form of narrative indeed has an impact on people that mere rhetoric does not. It causes us to be mentally transported into the narrative world, and this journey can have a profound impact on us. But how that journey changes us is then dependent upon the actual content of the story. Stories in which psychiatric patients murder young girls cause people to believe that psychiatric patients should have their

freedoms restricted, but a story about a lonely psychiatric patient feeling unfairly

restricted might result in the exact opposite.

Nussbaum relies heavily on the idea that novels make us wonder about the

characters and situations presented in a way that leads us to compare our own, real-

world situations to those presented in the novel, thus leading us to perhaps rethink the

world around us. When talking about her experience reading *Hard Times*, Nussbaum

says that

> As a reader (only one among many, and concretely situated in my own
>
> sphere), I notice that the lives of factory workers in my own society differ
>
> in some ways from the lives of the workers of Coketown; in other ways,
>
> however, they do not differ as much as I might wish. I assess these
>
> conditions with reference to certain very general norms of human
>
> flourishing that are built into my compassionate response, into its
>
> judgment of what is serious damage to a life and what is not.[146]

But the research on narrative transport suggests that this experience is increasingly

unlikely the more someone is transported. The more a story consumer is transported

the more her mental hold on the real-world dissolves away and the world of the story is

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[146] Nussbaum, Martha C. Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life.
Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995. Pg 7

accepted. Those transported by a story are less likely to critically engage the presented

narrative and less likely to be aware of or consider the real-world around them. As

critical engagement and focus on the real-world drop, it becomes increasingly unlikely

that a story consumer would have the critical experience that Nussbaum describes

above.[147]

I'll provide a counterpoint to Nussbaum's personal account of reading *Hard

Times* with my own, admittedly quite embarrassing, experience of reading a book that

influenced me in my youth. At the age of 20, having recently dropped out of college for

reasons I won't get into here, I joined the United States Navy as a missile technician. For

years, I served on the USS Alaska ballistic missile submarine, working on the Trident II D-

5 nuclear missiles, performing maintenance and practicing to launch them if the need

ever arose (thankfully it did not). One day, I got into a discussion with a shipmate about

our shared ethical concerns over what we did for a living. At the end of that discussion,

my shipmate said that he had brought a book with him underway that I might like.

Seeing as how I was a person who liked to think about philosophical issues, he thought

this book might resonate with me. He went off to his bunk and quickly returned with

what would become the very first philosophy book I ever read cover to cover: Ayn

Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

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[147] Although I am not prepared to fully make the claim here, it seems likely to me that Nussbaum's scholarly study of Dickens's text reduces transport, allowing her to more easily make the comparisons and criticisms she describes. However, as I have argued, I believe this experience would be less likely to occur in a more casual reader of the text.

As much as it pains me to write this now, my 20-year-old self loved that book. The story of Dagny Taggart's struggle to bring her railroad company to greatness against the constant obstacles of government oversight and weak-minded people looking for handouts had me hooked. John Galt's message rang true in my young ears. Why should those too lazy to work hard for themselves benefit off the labor and ingenuity of the true heroes of our society? Where would society be without the billionaires who take the risks and thereby deserve to reap the rewards? America is a land of freedom and opportunity, and the responsibility for anyone not making it lands firmly in that person's own lap. What if the genius entrepreneurs did just all up and vanish, fed up with the ungratefulness of the common man? What if Atlas did in fact shrug?

If I'm being honest, that book made me an insufferable jerk for years. Much like Nussbaum did with *Hard Times*, I noticed the lives of the characters in *Atlas Shrugged* and compared them to the lives of people in the real world. I saw that the business men and women in the novel were oppressed by the selfish, lazy people who couldn't succeed in life and so sought to bring the powerful down, and I saw that same situation played out in the world around me. The book shifted the way I interpreted the world and informed the sorts of moral and political views I created, but they were not the sorts that Nussbaum would in any way find acceptable.

Let me be clear that my message here is not one of censorship. I agree with John Stuart Mill's views on free speech and wouldn't have it any other way. In fact, as much as I now despise the ideas put forward in *Atlas Shrugged*, I credit that book with setting

me down a path that led me to this very point, writing a dissertation in philosophy and hopefully embarking on a career of teaching others to find the joys of philosophical thought and discovery. Rather, my aim is to give us a clearer picture of what narrative is, how it impacts us, and how it might be better used for our benefit. Nussbaum's work on the literary imagination is as impressive as it is important, but without the full, scientifically backed picture of how narrative works its magic on us, we run the risk of naively assuming that more narrative is the answer to all of our social problems.

The scientific research, I believe, supports something closer to the literary theory of mind view I discussed in the previous chapter than Nussbaum's literary imagination view. Narrative itself does do something that non-narrative texts do not, namely, narrative has the ability to transport us into narrative worlds. This transportation, I argue, does in fact do many of the things that Nussbaum argues narrative does: it helps us see the world and the people in it in new ways, it makes us wonder about their inner lives, it helps us develop fancy in that we can see the world more metaphorically and less straightforwardly. But what the research also shows is that how these things cash out depends on what the content of the narrative actually is. Our beliefs, attitudes, intentions, cognitive responses, and affective responses all do indeed shift as a result of experiencing narratives, but they shift in a manner that is consistent with the messaging implied in the content of the narrative. The form of narrative itself transports us, but the content of narrative determines what the destination looks like.

Further Research

As large as the body of literature on narrative transport is, there are a number of issues that require further investigation. First, the shifting of specifically moral beliefs, attitudes, and intentions has been largely overlooked by researchers. This is likely due to the abundance of researchers entering the literature with an eye towards narrative transport's potential benefits to the marketing world. Although there are isolated exceptions to this, for example, Green's 2004 study on people's views on homosexuality and affirmative action,[148] as well as a study by Eden et al. that looked in shifts of individuals moral intuitions after 8 weeks of watching soap operas with "morally relevant content."[149] These studies, however, are exceptions that prove the rule.

Second, not enough work has tested what, if any, behavioral shifts result from experiencing narrative transport. Intentions get close, but they don't tell us whether a person will actually follow through with what a narrative makes them want to do. The meta-analysis on narrative transport studies done by Braddock and Dillard discussed above found that, out of the 74 reviewed papers, only 5 studies arguably looked at behavior. Unfortunately, they do not indicate specifically which studies these were, but in my review of the literature I have only found a handful of research that focused on

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[148] Melanie C. Green (2004) Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism, Discourse Processes, 38:2, 247-266
[149] Eden, A., Tamborini, R., Grizzard, M., Lewis, R., Weber, R., & Prabhu, S. (2014). Repeated exposure to narrative entertainment and the salience of moral intuitions. *Journal of Communication, 64*(3), 501–520.

behavior, and most of that is within the space of health outcomes. Lochbuehler et al. found an increase in smoking in individuals who were more transported by narratives in which a character engaged in smoking behavior.[150] Williams et al. (2010) found that hospital patients exposed to narrative based smoking cessation videos were more likely to have quit smoking within 2 weeks than were patients exposed to non-narrative based smoking cessation videos.[151] And Kreuter et al. have done some interesting work looking at the role of narrative in encouraging cancer prevention behavior.[152] The fact remains, however, that more work needs to be done on narrative transport and behavior.

Finally, as a philosopher, I have a vested interest in knowing the true power of rhetorical argumentation. Argumentation has traditionally been the bread and butter of the philosopher; it's how we present our ideas, how we write papers and books, and how we teach the views of both contemporary and historical philosophical figures. But, if there is a better way of getting our ideas across, I want to know about it. Plus, I

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[150] Lochbuehler, K., M. Peters, R. H. J. Scholte, and R. C. M. E. Engels. "Effects of Smoking Cues in Movies on Immediate Smoking Behavior." Nicotine & Tobacco Research 12.9 (2010): 913-18

[151] Williams, J. H., M. C. Green, C. Kohler, J. J. Allison, and T. K. Houston. "Stories to Communi- cate Risks about Tobacco: Development of a Brief Scale to Measure Transportation into a Video Story - The ACCE Project." Health Education Journal 70.2 (2010): 184-91.

[152] Kreuter, Matthew W., Melanie C. Green, Joseph N. Cappella, Michael D. Slater, Meg E. Wise, Doug Storey, Eddie M. Clark, Daniel J. O'Keefe, Deborah O. Erwin, Kathleen Holmes, Leslie J. Hinyard, Thomas Houston, and Sabra Woolley. (2007) "Narrative Communication in Cancer Prevention and Control: A Framework to Guide Research and Application." Annals of Behavioral Medicine Ann. Behav. Med. 33.3: 221-35.

continue to be motivated by Aristotle's words in book two of the Nicomachean Ethics: "for we are inquiring not in order to know what excellence is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use."[153] If there is a better way to make ourselves and others good through our inquiries, I want to know what it is.

In chapter 3, I set out to add my own contribution to this growing literature of empirical studies. Specifically, I aim to accomplish three main tasks. First, I want to look at the impact of narrative transport on our moral beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Second, I want to, as best I can, to look at the impact of narrative transport on not just behavior, but moral behavior. And Third, I want to see if traditional philosophical arguments or narratives will be more effective in bringing about these changes in moral beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior. Subsequently, in chapter 4, I'll explore whether utilizing the findings in chapter 3 is a good idea or not.

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[153] 1103b27-28

Chapter 3

Narrative vs Argument: Empirical Studies into the Effectiveness of Narrative Transport for Motivating Charitable Donations

The most powerful words in English are, "Tell me a story."

-Pat Conroy
My Reading Life

Introduction

During an investigation into the nature of moral excellence in the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle makes a comment that has stuck in my mind since the first day I read it: "we are not inquiring into the nature of virtue simply for the sake of knowing it, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use" (1103b26). For Aristotle, this almost appears to be a throw-away line, a parenthetical meant to merely clarify his methodological approach to investigating the topic at hand. For me, however, this single sentence was earth shattering. Not only did it provide insight into how Aristotle thought about the study of moral philosophy, but in my mind, it began calling into question the very way ethics courses are taught throughout the world. After all, at that point in my academic career I had taken numerous courses on ethics, but none of the professors who taught those classes, nor the students who took them, seemed motivated by a desire to "become good."

What really made this line resonate with me was the way it validated beliefs about the study of philosophy I had been cultivating for years, beliefs that, at times,

made me feel alienated from my fellow academics. While my colleagues seemed content in seminars, colloquia, and private discussions to stay within the realm of the theoretical, I continually found my mind drifting back down to the practical, to ask myself how the topic at hand might be used to inform a person's day to day existence. This approach began influencing my methodological approach to philosophy as a whole, steering me towards topics that I hoped would help me live a better life. This had become my guiding principle, and to read one of the founders of Western philosophical thought echo that sentiment, even briefly, was monumentally moving and encouraging.

But this thought, that the purpose of studying moral philosophy is to become good, leads to an obvious empirical question: does it actually work? After all, inquiring into the nature of virtue is no simple matter. It's something that requires a tremendous amount of time and effort. We should surely want to know, before embarking on such a mission, that the means we have chosen will actually be effective in bringing about the desired end.

Since 2009, Eric Schwitzgebel and Joshua Rust have been trying to answer that very question by conducting a series of experiments geared towards determining whether ethics professors behave morally better than other professors. As the thinking goes, if the study of moral philosophy is going to have any effect at all, then we should certainly expect to see a difference in the behavior of professional ethicists, a group of people who arguably think about moral issues more than any other. If even ethics

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professors are not moved to action (or inaction!) by their philosophical research and

reflection, then what hope is there for the rest of us?

Unfortunately, early studies on the connection between ethical reflection and

ethical behavior are not producing reassuring results. Schwitzgebel and Rust have

found, time and time again, that US-based ethicists seem to behave no better than both

non-ethicist philosophers and non-philosophers across a host of measures. For example,

they found that, although they express stronger normative opinions than non-ethicists,

ethics professors self-report eating the meat of a mammal during their last evening

meal at roughly the same rate as non-ethicists.[154] Similarly, ethicists don't seem to pay

their conference registration fees at a higher rate,[155] reply to student emails more

often,[156] vote more often than their non-ethicist (and even non-political philosopher!)

counterparts, or even call their mothers at a higher rate.[157] These findings have since

been replicated with professors in German-speaking countries, lending some support to

this phenomenon existing cross-culturally.[158] While it's certainly arguable that some of

these measures might not be rightly considered "moral," it still seems perplexing that

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[154] Schwitzgebel, Eric. Rust, Joshua. "The Moral Behavior of Ethics Professors: Relationships Among Self-Reported Behavior, Expressed Normative Attitude, and Directly Observed Behavior" (2014), Philosophical Psychology, 27, 293-327.

[155] Schwitzgebel, Eric "Are Ethicists Any More Likely to Pay Their Registration Fees at Professional Meetings?" (2013), Economics & Philosophy, 29, 371-380.

[156] Schwitzgebel, Eric. Rust, Joshua. "Ethicists' and Non-Ethicists' Responsiveness to Student Emails: Relationships among Expressed Normative Attitude, Self-Described Behavior, and Experimentally Observed Behavior" (2013), Metaphilosophy, 44, 350-371.

[157] Schwitzgebel, Eric. Rust, Joshua. "The Moral Behavior of Ethics Professors: Relationships Among Self-Reported Behavior, Expressed Normative Attitude, and Directly Observed Behavior" (2014), Philosophical Psychology, 27, 293-327.

[158] Philipp Schönegger & Johannes Wagner (2019) The moral behavior of ethics professors: A replication-extension in German-speaking countries, Philosophical Psychology, 32:4, 532-559,

ethicists don't perform better on *any* scale that we might normally consider a factor in what makes someone a "good" person.

For a number of reasons, these results have never sat well with me. Surely studying ethics makes *some* people better under *some* conception of the word. I have always felt that my own studies in the field have shaped and influenced me over the years. Am I just mistaken? And more broadly, it is certainly the case that some people do in fact become morally better over the course of their lives. What is it that made *those* people better? Is there something we could utilize to change or otherwise augment the study of ethics so that it actually does improve the moral lives of its students?

As I've laid out in chapters one and two, there may be good reason to think that narrative is just such a candidate. There is sufficient research to conclude that narrative can be a powerful tool in the swaying of attitudes, beliefs, and even behavior in some situations. However, to the best of my knowledge, there has been little to no research done on the role of narrative in influencing moral behavior specifically, nor has work been done testing specifically philosophical argumentation against narrative. The existing research, I believe, reinforces my claim that the content of a narrative is what directs the literary theory of mind, my question then is will similar content presented in argument form have a similar impact? These three studies are an attempt to begin addressing these issues.

In what follows, I will detail three studies I conducted under the supervision of Eric Schwitzgebel between 2017 and 2018. These studies, I argue, show that narrative, and not philosophical arguments, are more effective at making participants better in one behavior that can arguably be construed as moral: charitable contributions.

"Moral behavior" is notoriously difficult to track in an objective, empirical way. Obviously, I had neither the time nor the funding to conduct a longitudinal study that tracked the behaviors of individuals over time. Such a study, I think, would be ideal for helping answer the questions at hand. However, I believe that the insights gleaned in this series of studies provide a highly valuable jump-off point for future lines of inquiry in both philosophy and behavioral psychology.

Experiment One

As I detailed in previous chapters, narrative transport has been identified as a mechanism responsible for changes in belief, attitude, intention, and affect in individuals. Although many studies have investigated this effect, few have looked at what might be seen as changes in moral attitudes, beliefs, and intentions. Furthermore, no studies, to my knowledge, attempt to investigate the possible changes to moral behavior brought about by the consumption of narrative.

The existing literature also brought about a lingering question in my mind: could narrative outperform philosophical argumentation in terms of eliciting changes in an

individual's moral attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and even behavior? I believe it is at least tacitly accepted by the general public, and among philosophers specifically, that arguments are meant to convince or otherwise sway opinions, beliefs, or attitudes. If narrative, rather than philosophical argumentation, is better at achieving this end, it could have a real-world impact on the way philosophers think about structuring their arguments, essays, and even classes.

This first experiment was meant as a pilot study. Its goal was to offer a proof of concept that the chosen medium and methodologies were able to produce the desired effects. I am including the pilot study in this dissertation because the results, while not perfect, were instrumental in informing how to change the subsequent studies and are themselves useful points of data in making the case that narrative transport is effective in swaying moral attitudes, intentions, and behavior. I've learned much from the setbacks along the way, and their inclusion is necessary to see the larger picture.

Methods

Medium

For this study, and all subsequent studies, I chose to use Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for participant recruitment and the online platform SurveyMonkey for the means of experimental stimulus creation and hosting, as well as for data collection.

MTurk describes itself as "a crowdsourcing marketplace that makes it easier for individuals and businesses to outsource their processes and jobs to a distributed workforce who can perform these tasks virtually".[159] Simply, MTurk is an online forum where individuals can create an account and browse through jobs known as Human Intelligence Tasks (HIT) that pay a set amount for the completion of tasks. Those tasks are regularly hosted on an external platform.

SurveyMonkey is an online survey creation and hosting service that allows individuals, organizations, and institutions to create simple or complex surveys. It also handles the hosting of those surveys at a dedicated web address that can be linked to an external crowdsourcing service like MTurk. Additionally, SurveyMonkey handles all data collection and aides in many other analytic tasks such as participant disqualification and data organization.

There are many benefits to taking a solely online approach to this study.[160] Online recruitment avoids some of the pitfalls with the so-called WEIRD problem found in many US-based studies, an acronym meant to capture that most participants are largely Western, Educated, and from Industrialized, Rich, Democratic countries.[161] Although the majority of my participants still fall into these categories, using MTurk does avoid relying solely on undergraduate students, a group that, despite their many

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[159] https://www.mturk.com/

[160] Follmer, D. J., Sperling, R. A., & Suen, H. K. (2017). The Role of MTurk in Education Research: Advantages, Issues, and Future Directions. Educational Researcher, 46(6), 329–334.

[161] Cheung, J.H., Burns, D.K., Sinclair, R.R. *et al.* Amazon Mechanical Turk in Organizational Psychology: An Evaluation and Practical Recommendations. *J Bus Psychol* **32,** 347–361 (2017).

differences, are more homogenous in many respects than the larger, non-academic population.

Additionally, online participant recruitment and experimental design allows for far more flexibility and efficiency than in-person participation. The cost of online recruitment through MTurk allows for more participants per condition resulting in a higher statistical power. Online experimental design and data collection also allows for problems in experimental design to be found much more quickly, which can result in a faster rectification of the discovered problem, meaning fewer wasted research dollars and workhours.

Finally, nothing about my experimental design requires or benefits from in person participants or face-to-face contact with researchers or their proxies. In fact, it's possible that live participants might feel pressure to "look better" to researchers by indicating more positive attitudes to charitable contributions, or by indicating more motivation to give to charity than they would under more anonymous conditions. Although the anonymity of participants could be easily secured in an in-person experimental design, the anonymity provided by an on-line design has the added benefit of appearing more anonymous from the perspective of the participants.

Participants and Recruitment

A total of 782 participants took part in this study, after removing participants with incomplete surveys and those who failed the comprehension test.[162] All participants were randomly sorted into one of four conditions by an ad hoc sorting system created within SurveyMonkey. Participants were given a link to a SurveyMonkey page that randomly showed that participant one of four pages, each containing a unique link to one of the four main experimental conditions. Once the participant clicked the link on the sorting page they were then taken to the actual survey where they completed the remainder of their randomly selected survey.

All participants were recruited through MTurk. For this study, recruitment was restricted to MTurk members who had completed more than 50 HITs in the past and with an overall HIT approval rate of over 95%. MTurk members were compensated $0.25 for participating in the study. The study was listed as a "survey" and all potential participants were given the following description:

Read a short piece of text and then answer questions about your attitudes and

beliefs

Compensation and description length and detail were consistent with other MTurk projects with similar time requirements and difficulty.

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[162] Unfortunately, the exact numbers of those failing the comprehension test, as well as those with incomplete surveys, were lost due to a data storage error. These numbers were initially analyzed to ensure that the comprehension tests were not too difficult. Nothing abnormal was noted at the time.

Material

The hypothesis of this study was that individuals who experience higher degrees of narrative transport will self-report more positive attitudes towards charitable contributions. To test this, I needed to create three primary stimuli, one narrative that showcases classic elements of narrative that have been shown in the literature to trigger narrative transport, one philosophical argument devoid of these narrative elements, and a control piece of text unrelated to charitable giving and also devoid of narrative elements. My aim was to make each text roughly the same length (450-600 words) and level of difficulty in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure.

Although multiple studies have shown that there is no appreciable difference in the level of narrative transport triggered between fictional and non-fictional narratives,[163] [164] [165] I decided to use a non-fiction narrative for the purposes of this study. No research, to my knowledge, has been done specifically on the effects of fiction vs non-fiction narratives used to influence attitudes towards charitable contributions. There is, however, evidence that individuals fail to experience belief change in response to narratives that have been labeled as fiction when that label makes the narrative

[163] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79 (5), 701– 21
[164] Green, M.C., Chatham, C.*, & Sestir, M.* (2012). Emotion and transportation into fact and fiction. Scientific Study of Literature, 2(1), 37-59.
[165] Strange, J. J., & Leung, C. C. (1999). How anecdotal accounts in news and fiction can influence judgments of a social problem's urgency, causes, and cures. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25(4), 436–449.

consumer think that the narrator has imperfect or inaccurate knowledge of the story.[166]

This provides some motivation to favor non-fiction rather than fictional stories in this

case.

The Narrative

Over 100 stories and testimonials posted to charitable organizations' websites

were reviewed as possible candidates for the narrative stimulus. Narratives were

evaluated based on the inclusion of strong narrative elements (identifiable and relatable

characters, an easily understandable plot with narrative arc, etc.), as well for the

prominence of the charitable organization being portrayed as saving or otherwise

providing benefits to the characters. The narrative also needed to have some amount of

vivid imagery presented in the text.

I settled on a narrative about a girl named Mamtha who's family was coerced in

bonded-labor slavery and who was subsequently liberated due to the actions of an

organization funded by ordinary people:

Mamtha's dreams were simple—the same sweet musings of any 10-year-old girl

around the world. But her life was unlike many other girls her age: She had no

friends and no time to draw. She was not allowed to attend school or even play.

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[166] Strange. J. J. (2013). How fictional Tales Wag Real-World Beliefs. Found in Narrative Impact, 263-286.

Mamtha was a slave. For two years, her every day was spent under the control of a harsh man who cared little for her family's health or happiness. Mamtha's father, Ramesh, had been farming his small plot of land in Tamil Nadu until a draught dried his crops and left him deeply in debt. Around that time, a broker from another state offered an advance to cover his debts in exchange for work on a farm several hours away.

Leaving their home village would mean uprooting the family and pulling Mamtha from school, but Ramesh had little choice. They needed the work to survive.

Once the family moved, however, they learned that much of the arrangement was a lie: They were brought to a sand mine, not a farm, and the small advance soon ballooned with ever-growing interest they couldn't possibly repay. This was bonded labor slavery.

Every day, Ramesh, his wife, and the other slaves rose before sunrise to begin working in the mine. For 16 hours a day, they hauled mud and filtered the sand in putrid sewage water. The conditions left them constantly sick and exhausted, but they were never allowed to take breaks or leave for medical care.

When Ramesh tried to ask about their low wages, the owner scolded and beat him badly. When he begged for his family to be released, again he was beaten and abused. Ramesh knew the owner was wealthy and well-connected in the community, so escape was not an option. There was nothing he could do.

Mamtha's family withered from malnutrition before her eyes in the sand mine. Every morning at 5 a.m., she watched with deep sadness as her parents left for another day of hard labor—and spent her day in fear this would soon become her fate. She was left to watch her baby sister, Anjali, and other younger children to keep them out of the way. Her carefree childhood was taken over by responsibility, hard work and crushed dreams.

Everything changed for Mamtha's family on December 20, 2013, when the international Justice Mission, a charitable aid organization funded largely by donations from everyday people, worked with a local government team on a rescue operation at the sand mine. Seven adults and five children were brought out of the facility, and government officials filed paperwork to totally shut down the illegal mine. After a lengthy police investigation, the owner will now face charges for deceiving and enslaving these families.

The next day, the government granted release certificates to all of the laborers. These certificates officially absolve the false debts, document the slaves' freedom, and help provide protection from the owner. The International Justice Mission aftercare staff helped take the released families back to their home villages to begin their new lives in freedom.

For Mamtha, starting over in her home village meant making those daydreams come true: She was enrolled back in school and could once again have a normal childhood. She's got big plans for her future—dreams that never would have

been possible if rescue had not come. She says confidently, "Today, I still want to

be a doctor. Now that I am back in school, I know I can achieve my dream."

In addition to possessing the basic narrative elements mentioned above, this narrative possesses elements known to evoke high levels of narrative transport. Here I had in mind three of Van Laer et al.'s storyteller antecedents.[167] These elements are one, characters with whom the story receiver can identify, two, a plot that story receivers can imagine, and three, high levels of verisimilitude. Additionally, the story has a satisfying emotional arc in that it ends on a positive note and an appropriately placed climax that may also facilitate narrative transport.[168]

In terms of characters, this narrative is brimming with identifiability. Everyone reading the narrative will have been a child at some point and as such will be in a position to identify with the character of Mamtha. The desire to draw, play, and have friends are things that every story consumer should be in a position to identify with. The story also invites the reader to wonder about the inner life of Mamtha, to imagine what she must be feeling as the events of the story unfold. As discussed in chapter one, this is an element that Nussbaum identifies as crucial for highly impacting narratives.

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[167] van Laer, Tom et al.. "The Extended Transportation-imagery Model: A Meta-analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation". Journal of Consumer Research 40.5 (2014): 797–817.
[168] van Laer, Tom and Feiereisen, Stephanie and Visconti, Luca M., Storytelling in the Digital Era: A Meta-Analysis of Relevant Moderators of the Narrative Transportation Effect (2019). Journal of Business Research, 96(1), 135-146

In addition to Mamtha, we are also briefly introduced to members of Mamtha's family. In particular, the way Mamtha's father, Ramesh, is portrayed makes him an easy target of identification. Many participants may have children of their own or will at least have been a child in a family with a parental figure who struggled to do what is best for his or her family. Regardless of the participant's life situation, there is a likely target for character identification with this narrative.

In terms of plot, the chosen narrative showcases numerous elements that are conducive to narrative transport. The plot has a clear beginning, middle, and end, and each step of the way we can easily imagine the situation and the locations in which the events are taking place. For example, we can easily imagine a lush farm and then picture it being ravaged by drought, the harsh conditions in the sand mine where Mamtha's family is forced to labor, and the happy family back at home once liberated by the relief organization.

Perhaps most importantly, although it is unlikely that any of the study participants will have actually experienced the events that take place in the narrative, the verisimilitude, or the believability, of the events make it both easier to identify with the characters and to imagine the plot unfolding. For example, the actions of Ramesh in the story are consistent with what we or fathers we know might do. It is believable and understandable that a father might take advantage of a risky business proposition in order to provide for his family. The overall story arc also falls in line with what many of us at least a tacit understanding that forced labor situations happen around the world.

Finally, the story has an emotional arc that properly features the charitable organization in a favorable light. This story begins with an emotional hook: the loss of Mamtha's childhood innocence. We then continue the emotional ride as we learn how Mamtha's family went from innocent farmers to forced slave laborers. In the end, we experience joy and relief when the family is rescued and experience hope that Mamtha will now get to fulfil her dreams. Much of this uptick in emotion is centered around the rescue which is facilitated by the charitable organization.

This is important, as research has shown that those experiencing narrative transport experience a change in story-consistent beliefs and attitudes. In this case, the goal of this text is to persuade individuals to shift their beliefs and attitudes regarding charitable giving. By portraying the organization in a positive light and associating it with this narrative uptick in emotion, we give the narrative the best chance of swaying views on charities and charitable giving specifically.

The Argument

There are a number of prominent philosophical figures who have argued that we have a moral obligation to give to charities that help people in extreme poverty around the world. For the purposes of this study, I chose to go with an argument inspired by

Peter Singer's famous arguments found in his widely popular essay *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* (1972).[169]

I decided to go this route for a number of reasons. First, I have personal experience with Peter Singer and his arguments and tend to find them quite persuasive. In fact, it was reading this exact text that motivated me in my own life to give more to organizations fighting global poverty. There are also practical reasons to pick an argument that has withstood the test of time, so to speak. Going with a Singer-style argument gives the added benefit of using a tremendously popular and often-cited argument in favor of giving to charity. There may be something to yielding to prevailing public wisdom.

To help settle the issue of which exact Singer argument to use, I turned to an argument that had already been used in a study and found to have a positive effect on people's attitudes and behavior towards giving to charities that combat global poverty. In a study still under review, Luke Buckland et al. created a Singer-style argument for charitable giving, had that argument approved by Peter Singer himself, and then tested it against control. They found that the argument "measurably affected participants judgments about moral duty, in contrast to non-moral control".[170]

In order to bring the word count of the argument up to par with that of the narrative, and to overall increase the chances of participants understand what the

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[169] Singer, Peter. Philosophy and Public Affairs, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 229-243
[170] Luke Buckland, David Rodríguez-Arías, and Carissa Véliz. "Testing the Motivational Strength of Positive and Negative Duty Arguments Regarding Global Poverty" (under review)

argument was saying, I added text after the Singer argument that helps explain, in layman's terms, the main thrusts of the argument. This portion also includes some concrete examples of what is being suggested in the argument to also help with compression.

The text used for the argument is as follows:

1. *A great deal of extreme poverty exists, which involves suffering and death from hunger, lack of shelter, and lack of medical care. Roughly a third of human deaths (some 50,000 daily) are due to poverty-related causes.*

2. *If you can prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, you ought to do so and it is wrong not to do so.*

3. *By donating money to trustworthy and effective aid agencies that combat poverty, you can help prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, without sacrificing anything nearly as important.*

4. *Countries in the world are increasingly interdependent: you can improve the lives of people thousands of miles away with little effort.*

5. *Your geographical distance from poverty does not lessen your duty to help. Factors like distance and citizenship do not lessen your moral duty.*

6. *The fact that a great many people are in the same position as you with respect to poverty does not lessen your duty to help. Regardless of whether*

you are the only person who can help or whether there are millions of people who could help, this does not lessen your moral duty.

7. *Therefore, you have a moral duty to donate money to trustworthy and effective aid agencies that combat poverty, and it is morally wrong not to do so.*

For example, $20 spent in the United States could buy you a fancy restaurant meal or a concert ticket, or instead it could be donated to a trustworthy and effective aid agency that could use that money to reduce suffering due to extreme poverty. By donating $20 that you might otherwise spend on a fancy restaurant meal or a concert ticket, you could help prevent suffering due to poverty without sacrificing anything equally important. The amount of benefit you would receive from spending $20 in either of those ways is far less than the benefit that others would receive if that same amount of money were donated to a trustworthy and effective aid agency.

Although you cannot see the beneficiaries of your donation and they are not members of your community, it is still easy to help them, simply by donating money that you would otherwise spend on a luxury item. In this way, you could help to reduce the number of people in the world suffering from extreme poverty. You could help reduce suffering and death due to hunger, lack of shelter, lack of medical care, and other hardships and risks related to poverty.

With little effort, by donating to a trustworthy and effective aid agency, you can improve the lives of people suffering from extreme poverty. According to the argument above, even though the recipients may be thousands of miles away in a different country, you have a moral duty to help if you can do so without sacrificing anything of equal importance.

The goal of this stimulus is to present the argument in a textual form that does not trigger, or at least triggers to as low a degree as possible, narrative transport in the participants. To achieve this, I made sure it lacked all the relevant elements listed above and in previous chapters. For example, it has no identifiable characters, with the possible exception of "you." However, there is nothing in the transport literature to suggest that second personal pronoun use can trigger narrative transport. Also, there are no identifiable plot elements or overt appeals to emotion and certainly no climaxes in action or emotion to speak of. The information is presented in a cold, straightforward, fact-oriented sort of way.

There is a slight concern that certain elements of the addendum in particular, namely, the cause and effect style portrayal of what the participant might be able to do with $20, is itself a narrative element. These sorts of issues, I believe, are unavoidable and ultimately not a problem for this study. First, the primary aim of this study is to see whether narrative transport is a predictor of changes in beliefs and attitudes towards charitable contributions. As such, I am only concerned that the narrative induces

narrative transport and the argument does not. Although it's possible the participants could begin imagining what they might give up in order to give more to charity, and then also imagine what the recipients of that charity might be like and what they might do with their new lease on life, these are likely not enough to elicit full-fledged narrative transport in the ways the narrative condition is designed to create.

Additionally, I am of the mind that one or two narrative elements does not a full narrative make. "My name is Chris, I have brown hair, I enjoy long walks on the beach, and I live in Chino, California" certainly has a character, some information fleshing him out, and a location, all elements that might also be included in a strong narrative. However, this, I think many would agree, is not itself a narrative. Again, it might begin to evoke wonder in the Nussbaumian sense discussed in earlier chapters, but it should not worry us that it shares fleeting similarities to proper narratives.

The Control

The control condition text stimulus needed to be roughly the same length as the narrative and argument conditions while also maintaining a similar vocabulary and difficulty. I wanted to find a text that is completely unrelated topically to charity or world poverty, not itself an argument, and also not a narrative and with as few narrative elements as possible.

I settled on a text from a middle school science textbook on energy. To further ensure it contained as few narrative elements as possible, I tied together unconnected

paragraphs from the chapter on the off chance that the author of the text had included some unseen narrative arc. The text for the control condition is as follows:

Without energy, nothing could ever change. Pure energy itself cannot be smelled, tasted, touched, seen, or heard. However, energy does appear in many forms, such as motion and heat. Energy can travel in different ways, such as in light and sound waves and in electricity. The workings of the entire universe (including all of our technology) depend on energy flowing and changing back and forth from one form to another.

Energy is a quantity that measures the ability to change. Anything with energy can change itself or cause change in other objects or systems.

Energy can cause changes in temperature, speed, position, momentum, pressure, or other physical variables. Energy can also cause change in materials, such as burning wood changing into ashes and smoke.

Examples of energy:

• A gust of wind has energy because it can move objects in its path.

• A piece of wood in a fireplace has energy because it can produce heat and light.

• You have energy because you can change the motion of your body.

• Batteries have energy; they can be used in a radio to make sound.

• Gasoline has energy; it can be burned in an engine to move a car.

• A ball at the top of a hill has energy because it can roll down the hill and move objects in its path.

The unit of measurement for energy is the joule (J). One joule is the energy needed to push with a force of 1 newton over a distance of 1 meter. The joule is an abbreviation for one newton multiplied by 1 meter. If you push on your calculator with a force of 1 newton while it moves a distance of 1 meter across a table, 1 joule of your energy is converted into the energy of the calculator's motion.

Energy can never be created or destroyed, just converted from one form into another. The idea that energy converts from one form into another without a change in the total amount is called the law of conservation of energy. The law of conservation of energy is one of the most important laws in physics. It applies to all forms of energy.

The law of conservation of energy tells us energy cannot be created from nothing. If energy increases somewhere, it must decrease somewhere else. The key to understanding how systems change is to trace the flow of energy. Once we know how energy flows and transforms, we have a good understanding of how a system works. When we use energy to drive a car, that energy comes from

chemical energy stored in gasoline. As we use the energy, the amount left in the

form of gasoline decreases.[171]

The text is easy to read and relatively easy to understand. It has the added benefit of having a small bulleted section similar to the argument condition, while having a length and readability similar to the narrative condition. I see no obvious narrative elements within the text.

Measures

The goal of this "pilot study" was to show that narrative, through the mechanism of narrative transport, outperforms philosophical argument with regard to swaying beliefs and attitudes about charitable giving. To that end, participants were asked to respond to three prompts after being given the text stimulus. Two of the prompts were modeled, although not directly taken, from the forthcoming 2016 Buckland et al. study discussed above. The thinking here is that since the Singer-style argument had already been tested and shown to be persuasive along these measures, it would give the argument condition the strongest possible chance of beating the narrative condition in this current study. The third prompt asks about the participants' intentions to give at least $2 to a charity of their choice within the next 24 hours.

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[171] CPO Physical Science Middle School 6-8 Copyright 2016 CPO Science. Chapter 6

The questions were as follows:

1. *It is morally good to give money to charities that help those in extreme poverty.*

2. *People like me should give money to charities that help people in extreme poverty.*

3. *There are many well-known, trustworthy, and effective charities that help people in extreme poverty around the world. Most now accept donations through secure webpages. Givewell.org, givingwhatwecan.org, and charitywatch.org are all examples of sites that help people find trustworthy charities that align with your values. Please consider donating to one of these charities now.*
   How likely are you to find a charity you approve of within the next 24 hours and donate at least $2 U.S. dollars?

In Buckland et al. 2016, researchers asked participants to respond to two questions. The first was "People have a moral duty to donate money to trustworthy and effective aid agencies that combat poverty" and the second was "It is morally wrong NOT to donate money to trustworthy and effective aid agencies that combat poverty, if a person is able to."

The purpose of the Buckland et al. study was to test the motivation strength of positive and negative duty arguments regarding global poverty. For my study, I wanted to avoid evoking thoughts of duty and rather focus on concepts of moral goodness and the perception of normative pressure to donate. As such, I adjusted the first two prompts to reflect this.

Anticipating the direction of the next two studies, I added the third prompt in an attempt to gauge the effectiveness of narrative and philosophical argument to sway the intentions to give subsequent to stimulus, perhaps gaining some insight into possible shifts in charitable intentions. In writing this prompt, I attempted to avoid issues caused by mismatches in the participants' and charities' value sets by empowering the participants to find charities of their own choosing. The idea was that by informing participants of the ease with which they could both research and donate to a charity (participants are, after all, already on a computer with internet access if they are taking part in the study at all), many barriers and objections to donating might be overcome by the information presented along with the prompt. The prompt also contained hotlinks that opened in an additional browser window for each of the watchdog groups mentioned.

Participants were asked to respond to each prompt by indicating their agreement with the statement on a 7-point Likert Scale. Prompts one and two were anchored by "I completely disagree" and "I completely agree" with "I neither agree nor

disagree" at the center point. Prompt 3 was anchored by "Not likely at all" and "Extremely likely" with "Unsure" at the center point.

Transportation Scale

To measure narrative transport, participants were given a modified version of Green and Brock's transportation scale.[172] This scale has emerged as the golden standard within the transportation literature and is used in numerous studies on narrative transport.[173] The scale consists of 11 prompts and asks participants to rate their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by "I completely disagree" and "I completely agree" with "I neither agree nor disagree" at the center point.

The transportation scale presented to participants was as follows:

1. *While I was reading the text, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.*

2. *While I was reading the text, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.*

3. *I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the text.*

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[172] Green, Melanie C., and Timothy C. Brock (2000), "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79 (5), 704
[173] van Laer, Tom et al.. "The Extended Transportation-imagery Model: A Meta-analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation". *Journal of Consumer Research* 40.5 (2014): 797–817.

4. *I was mentally involved in the text while reading it.*

5. *After finishing the text, I found it easy to put out of my mind.*

6. *I wanted to learn how the text ended.*

7. *The text affected me emotionally.*

8. *I found myself thinking of ways the text could have turned out differently.*

9. *I found my mind wandering while reading the text.*

10. *The events in the text are relevant to my everyday life.*

11. *The events in the text have changed my life.*

The only alteration between this scale and the original scale used by Green and Brock is the changing of the word "narrative" in the original to "text" in my version. This was done to avoid confusion in the argument and control conditions of the experiment. Participants who were given the control text on energy or the Singer-style argument may experience confusion, thinking they were meant to be given a narrative, but somehow missed it. I tried to avoid this type of confusion, as it may distract or otherwise derail the experiment, perhaps causing the participants to try and backtrack and find the missing narrative

There are, however, other confusions that could arise out of giving this scale to the control and argument conditions, but I ultimately determined that those confusions are tolerable and would not jeopardize the results. For instance, participants in the control condition might not know exactly how to respond to prompts referring to

"events" in the text or the prompt asking if the participant wanted to know how the text ended. It is also possible that participants in the control condition could find prompts like "the events in the text have changed my life" as being particularly absurd (is learning about a unit of energy particularly life changing?).

Upon reflection, though, I decided that any sort of confusion or pushback against the prompts would be more likely to be indications of a lack of narrative transport than an indication of a problem with the methodology of the study. As discussed in previous chapters, narrative transport is a phenomenon marked by changes made to the transported individual, and any pushbacks against these questions are likely only further proof that the individual was not transported by the text. For example, any participant who found laughable the thought that a middle school text on a unit of energy would change her life would likely mark "I completely disagree" to that prompt and therefore accurately register a low score on my transportation scale.

The scale itself is meant to capture the various aspects of narrative transport, with items 1, 3, and 4 meant to capture cognitive aspects of transport and items 5, 7, and 11, meant to capture affective elements. Elements 2 and 9 are meant to capture the phenomenon where the external world begins to "melt away" and become less accessible as we are transported into a narrative world. Element 10 captures aspects of both verisimilitude and identifiability with plot and events taking place in the narrative, features that both facilitate higher levels of transport. Elements 6 and 8 are meant to capture general engagement with the text. Finding oneself wondering how the text

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might end or how things could have turned out differently are general indicators that a person is "caught up" in the story. It's noteworthy here that the inducement of wonder is one of the main things that Nussbaum looks for in a quality narrative or novel.

One unfortunate drawback to this scale is the absence of elements meant to capture the degree to which participants experience vivid imagery of the specific scenes depicted in the narrative. In Green and Brock's original 2000 transportation scale, an additional 4 prompts were added that varied per condition and were tailored to the specific narrative the participant read. This approach worked for their studies because participants in all conditions were given a narrative, and so each condition could be given a set of 4 additional prompts that were nearly identical except for one word unique to that narrative. For example, one condition might receive an additional prompt stating "while reading the narrative I had a vivid image of Katie" while participants in another condition might see the prompt "while reading the narrative I had a vivid image of the psychiatrist."

I determined that to use a similar protocol for my study would potentially do more harm than it is worth. I wanted to keep the questions asked in each condition identical to avoid problems in data analysis, and it became quickly apparent that to create unique prompts for each condition that would make sense to the participants in those conditions would mean creating prompts that were different enough as to cause concern. However, I felt confident that the 11-element transportation scale, without the 4 tailored vivid imagery prompts, would suffice for adequately measuring the narrative

transport of all participants while maintaining tidiness in data collection and analysis. Additionally, questions 1 and 3, while not specific to the narrative, do gauge the general degree of imagery experienced by participants.

Consent Form

A consent form was presented to all participants upon being sorted into their respective conditions. General information about the study was given, as well as information about where to contact me with questions. Importantly, the title of the study given to participants was "The Attitudes and Beliefs of Everyday People." This title was intentionally vague to not give people warning and thus time to consider their charitableness ahead of the experimental stimulus. Additionally, I wanted to avoid a sort of self-selection bias where participants who either are eager to or reluctant to engage with others regarding their views on charitable donations would be more likely to continue with or abandon the study.

Another thing worth noting about the consent form is that in the description of the study, the text informs participants that they will be asked to answer a series of short questionnaires about their attitudes and beliefs on a topic which "may or may not be related to the text you read." This was an attempt to help alleviate any of the confusion mentioned above with regard to elements of the transport questionnaire not

perfectly lining up with what the participant read in the control and argument conditions.

Exclusion Questions

In any study there is reason to want to make sure your participants are taking the task seriously and reading the provided stimulus carefully. However, due to the nature of narrative transport, I was particularly interested in making sure participants were actually reading and comprehending the given texts.

Participants in each condition were given a question (two questions in the case of the Narrative + Argument condition) that aims to test whether the person actually read the stimulus. Participants in the control condition were asked "what is the unit of energy discussed in the text?" with the options being: ohm, calorie, joule, watt, and pascal. Participants in the argument condition were asked "according to the text, we have a moral duty to:" with the options being: become vegetarians, donate money to trustworthy and effective aid agencies that combat poverty, travel around the world helping people, make sure the clothing we buy is not made in sweatshops, treat those around us with care and respect. And participants in the narrative condition were asked "where did Mamtha and her family work in the text?" with the options being: farm, market, factory, sand mine, slaughterhouse. Participants in the narrative + argument condition were given both questions from the argument and the narrative conditions.

One possible limitation of this study lies in potential difficulty imbalances between exclusion questions. As noted above, the number of excluded participants was unfortunately lost due to a data storage error, making it difficult to ensure that participants failed the comprehension questions to a roughly equal degree. This is problematic because if some conditions allowed in weaker participants than others, this could impact the reliability of the data. However, excluded participants, while unable to be reported accurately here, were not flagged as problematically lopsided. That being said, this limitation is worth noting.

Demographic Questions

Participants in all conditions were asked their gender with the options of female, male, or a free-response box to input another identity. They were also asked their age and given a series of range options.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through MTurk and sorted into one of four conditions where they were presented with the narrative, the argument, both the narrative and argument, or the control text. They were then asked the three questions about their views about giving to charity. After this they were given the 11-question

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transportation questionnaire, followed by the exclusion question (or questions in the case of the narrative and argument condition), and finally they were asked the demographic questions. Participants were then asked to input their MTurk worker identification number to ensure they received compensation on MTurk.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this first study was to act as a proof of concept for the experimental design and to show that narrative outperforms argument with regard to changing views about donating to charity. Additionally, I hypothesized that narrative transport would be a predictor for the differences seen between conditions. To these purposes, this experiment was a success.

As noted above, the data from all participants who failed a comprehension question were removed and not included in analysis. Slightly more participants failed the comprehension questions for the two narrative conditions than the non-narrative conditions. This caused a slight imbalance between groups in terms of sample sizes with argument N=254, Control N=205, Narrative N=161, and Narrative + Argument N=162. However, because the data is assumed to be normally distributed and have homogeneity of variance, these differences should not have an impact on statistical analysis.

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I considered doing exclusions based on study completion time, excluding participants who finished in under a certain time threshold. The idea behind this would be to exclude individuals who finished before a person could reasonably be expected to carefully read and comprehend the texts. However, I decided against this for a number of reasons. Before collecting data, I had difficulty settling on a reasonable time to set as the threshold that wasn't arbitrary. I couldn't find anything in the existing literature that would help me make a principled decision in this regard. Also, after data collection I tried numerous post-hoc exclusions based on time, none of which significantly altered the findings while only working to lower statistical power. For these reasons I made no exclusions based off of time.

Beginning with question one, asking whether it is good to give money to charities that help those in extreme poverty, the mean results on the 7-point Likert scale were as follows:

Q1. It is good to give to charity

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	6.157	1.145
Control	6.132	0.994
Narrative	6.484	0.767
Narrative + Argument	6.395	0.980

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 778], F=5.66, p=.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test, I find that the narrative and argument conditions are significantly different, as are the control and narrative, with no other significant differences found between groups.

For question two, asking whether people "like me" should give to charities that help those in extreme poverty, the mean results on the 7-point Likert scale were as follows:

Q2. People like me should give to charity

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	5.650	1.414
Control	5.522	1.308
Narrative	5.863	1.148
Narrative + Argument	5.969	1.297

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 778], F=4.39, p=.004). Running a post-hoc Tukey test, I find that the control and narrative + argument conditions are significantly different, but with no other significant differences found bwtween groups.

For question three, asking how likely participants are to find a charity they approve of and donate at least $2 in the next 24 hours, the mean results on a 7-point Likert scale were as follows:

Q3. How likely are you to give in the next 24 hours?

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	4.465	1.910
Control	4.010	2.015
Narrative	4.242	2.088
Narrative + Argument	4.358	1.936

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are not significantly different (ANOVA [3, 778], F=2.11, p=.097).

I then took participants' overall transportation score and analysed it against condition. The mean results on a range of 7-77 were as follows:

Transportation Score

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	53.835	8.952
Control	51.610	8.689
Narrative	56.174	8.324
Narrative + Argument	56.352	8.694

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 778], F=12.25, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test, I find that argument and control are significantly different than narrative and narrative + argument, and that there is no significant difference between argument and control or between narrative and narrative + argument.

Although some of these results are rather messy, they do show promise and support the hypothesis that narrative outperforms argument with regard to changing participants' views about the morality of donating to charities that combat extreme poverty.

Among the questions, question one best shows the hypothesized picture emerge. Although the effect is rather small, we can see that the control and argument conditions are closely grouped with the narrative and narrative + argument conditions also grouped. This is what I expected to see if narrative indeed has an impact on story-

consistent beliefs. Question two seems to trend that dirrection as well, but only the

control and narrative + argument conditions are statistically significant.

The overall downward trend in means from question one to question three is

also noteworthy. As the questions become more self-directed and demanding the self-

reported views become much less positive with roughly a one-point reduction between

each question. In other words, participants in this study seem less likely to agree with

moral statements that demand more of them. This alligns with common sense, and I

believe it should inspire confidence in the self-report nature of the study.

The more interesting result is that of the transportation score by condition. Here

we can much more clearly see the two groups, argument and control in one and

narrative and narrative + argument in the other, begin to pull away from one another:
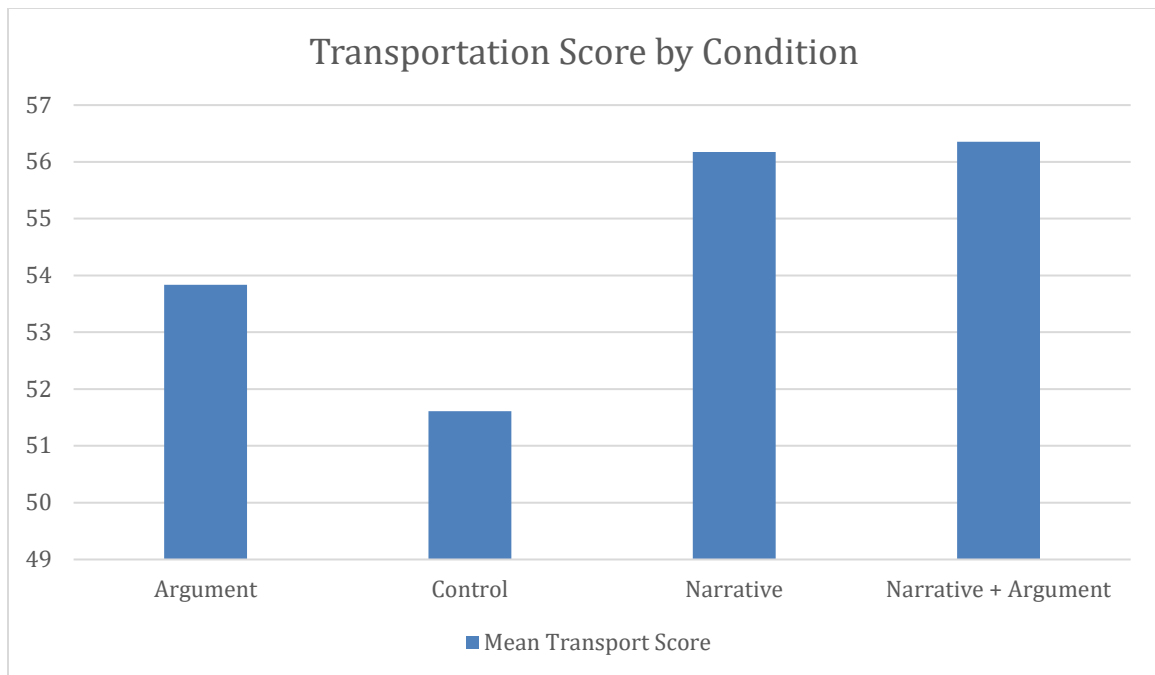
Figure 3.1
Transportion score by condition for experiment one.

Although we do see a bump in argument over control, these two groups are not significantly different. It is also easier to see here that the narrative and narrative + argument conditions are not significantly different. Additionally, I found transport score to be moderately correlated with answers on all three questions: Question one, $r(779)=.42$, $p<.001$; question two, $r(779)=.47$, $p<.001$; question three, $r(779)=.39$, $p<.001$. In a regression analysis, transport was significantlly predictive of motivation to give ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < .001$) but condition was not ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = .220$).[174] Similarly, transport was significantly predictive of self-reported donation in question 3 ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < .001$),

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[174] Scale for transport was 7-77 whereas scale for condition was 1-4.

as was motivation score (β = 0.30, p < .001), but again not condition (β = -0.08, p = .140).[175]

This shows that my chosen narrative was not only succesful in triggering narrative transport at rates significantly higher than both control and argument only conditions, but that there is a moderate relationship between the degree of narrative transport and self-reported views on charitable donations after reading a pro-charity narrative. The regression analysis also suggests that the work is being done by the degree of transportation and not something else found within each condition.

Collectively, this data gave me general confidence that one, my narrative triggers transport, two, that it triggers transport at a higher rate than the Singer-style argument and control texts, and three, that exposure to at least one pro-charity narrative changes views on charitable donations at a higher rate than exposure to at least one Singer-Style argument.

This pilot study also showed some general problems to be kept in mind for future studies. The conditions were not statistically significant with regard to question three, and although there was a significant difference in question two, the difference was rather small and there was only a significant difference between the control and narrative + argument conditions.

There are a number of explanations for this that could inform changes to the design of future experiemnts. First of all, question three is likely not a good fit for the

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[175] Scale for transport was 7-77, motivation score was 2-14, and condition was 1-4.

types of participants recruited from MTurk. Studies overwhelmingly indicate that MTurk

workers reliably produce data that is comperable to more conventional approaches of

data collection like in person surveys and interviews (Mortensen & Hughes 2018).

However, when crafting questions for MTurk it is important to understand the context

and mentality of those engaging on the platform.

Although most MTurk workers are not using the platform for full-time

employment, the average worker does spend around eight hours per week as a way of

earning extra income (Ross et al. 2009). This indicates that workers are motivated

financially and are thus likely interested in efficient use of their time. As such, question

three probably asks entirely too much of MTurk workers. Regardless of how transported

an MTurk worker is, asking them to take the time to research effectively charities on

their own time and then donate at least $2 of their own money is simply a bridge too

far. The time and financial investment the question asks goes against an MTurk worker's

motivation for being on the platform.

Additionally, experiment one left recruitment open to the entire world

population of MTurk workers. If there were a large number of foreign workers with

lower English language proficiency, this might cause unique problems for this type of

study. As discussed in chapters one and two, it is possible that the structure of narrative

itself is sufficient to induce transport. However, a sufficient understanding of the

content of the narrative might be required for the inducement of narrative-consistent

belief and attitude shifts. It is entirely possible that some participants with lower English

language proficiencies were in fact transported by the text but failed to fully comprehend the entirety of the text and thus failed to achieve narrative-consistent belief changes.

Given these two concerns, it prompted an overhaul to question 3 as well as the limiting of recruitment to individuals within the United States. Although the recruitment limitation does not guarantee a higher level of English language proficiency, it does raise the propability that those participanting in the study will have a better chance of fully understanding the provided texts.

Experiment Two

This second experiment aimed to build upon the successes of experiment one while addressing some of the weaknesses that held it back. In experiment one, I learned that the MTurk recruitment and SurveyMonkey hosting approach worked well and could be optimized with slight tweaks to the recruitment parameters implemented on MTurk.[176] In particular, I had a high number of participants fail the exclusion questions and had an overall lower than expected rate of narrative transport detected in the narrative condition.

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[176] I am indebted to conversation with Will Dunlop for helping me fine tune my MTurk recruitment skills.

As a result, I decided to limit inclusion in the study to MTurk members within the United States. Although this perhaps limits the universalizability of the collected data, it does raise the chances that the participants are more proficient in the English language. At the core of it, these are studies about narratives and their ability to change our moral behavior, and that simply can't happen if you can't or struggle to read the narrative due to language barriers. I was concerned that drawing from the global community might have brought in participants who are not proficient enough in English to be sufficiently transported and thus have the effects of narrative transport take place.

Furthermore, I wanted to conduct a study that began to move closer to measuring changes in actual behavior. To do that, experiment two was designed to use a hypothetical donation scenario where participants are asked to imagine how much of a hypothetical $10 bonus they would give to a charity of their choice. Although intentions about hypothetical sums of money are not the same as actual behavior, this still helps sharpen the picture of how narrative transport impacts charitable donations.

There are a host of potential issues that could arise with regard to using a hypothetical donation experimental design. Intuitively, there are concerns that participants may not take the question seriously due to its hypothetical nature. In other words, participants might be more likely to indicate a higher level of intention to donate their hypothetical $10 bonus because it is in fact hypothetical and not in their actual possession. The reported level of donation might not coincide with, and likely trend upwards from, what the participant would donate were the donation actual.

The issue of hypothetical bias is a real concern. However, there are good reasons to think it would not be an issue for this specific study. First, there are numerous studies within the Contingent Valuation literature that find participant reports of hypothetical payments are either equal to or in some cases themselves higher than their real cash donation conditions. Contingent Valuation is a technique used by economists to estimate the value of non-market goods or resources (such as the environment) by using surveys to ask people what they would hypothetically give to protect or restore that good or resource. This is also known as a "stated preference" approach, as it determines a population's stated opinions or intentions rather than the results of their actual behavior.

In one study conducted by Macmillan et al., hypothetical payments were found to be slightly lower than actual payments in a situation where the recipient of the payment was a charitable organization, bucking the trend of hypothetical payments trending higher than real payments in other studies.[177] In related studies on the endowment effect, Kogler et al. found that hypothetical endowment resulted in the same willingness to pay values as did actual endowment.[178] These results give hope that hypothetical donation designs can at times give similar results to actual donation scenarios.

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[177] Macmillan, D.C., Smart, T.S. & Thorburn, A.P. A Field Experiment Involving Cash and Hypothetical Charitable Donations. Environmental and Resource Economics 14, 399–412 (1999).
[178] Kogler, Christoph & Kühberger, Anton & Gilhofer, Rainer, 2013. "Real and hypothetical endowment effects when exchanging lottery tickets: Is regret a better explanation than loss aversion?," Journal of Economic Psychology, Elsevier, vol. 37(C), pages 42-53.

But even if hypothetical bias is unavoidable, there are two reasons it should not

nullify results from this study. First, even if the results are not on par with what I would

get from an actual donation design, the results may still give us insight into both how

people decide to give to charitable organizations and also possibly how people might

give in an actual donation scenario. In a 2010 study, David Heshner found that analyzing

revealed preference studies in which participants' hypothetical donations are compared

to their real donation experiences show that we are able to utilize hypothetical donation

data to estimate real world behavior that has "a meaningful link to real market

activity."[179] In other words, even if the hypothetical donation data is not identical to real

world donation behavior, the hypothetical data may give us enough insight to learn

something meaningful about real world scenarios.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this is ultimately a study about

relative values as opposed to absolute values. I am more concerned with whether

narrative, through the mechanism of narrative transport, can outperform philosophical

argumentation with regard to persuading charitable donations. If hypothetical bias

exists, it should exist across all conditions. As such, the noise will effectively "cancel

out," since the boost, or drop, in hypothetical donation caused by bias will be equal in

each condition, thus retaining the relative difference with narrative transport as a

predictor. The reason hypothetical bias is such a problem for contingent value studies is

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[179] Hensher, David. (2010). Hypothetical Bias, Choice Experiments and Willingness to Pay. Transportation Research Part B: Methodological. 44. 735-752

because those studies are interested in finding absolute, not relative, values. The people

and institutions running contingent value surveys are attempting to find real world

values to input into actual governmental and regulatory body policy. As such, the

absolute values output by those studies are crucially important and bias becomes a

larger issue. That is simply not the case for my study.

Methods

Medium

MTurk and SurveyMonkey proved to be effective and efficient platforms for

experiment one and were carried over into experiment two.

Participants and Recruitment

A total of 1023 participants took part in this study, after removing participants

with incomplete surveys and those who failed the comprehension test. As with

experiment one, all participants were randomly sorted into one of four conditions using

a sorting system created in SurveyMonkey. 603 participants identified as female, 411

identified as male, and 9 chose other or failed to identify. Median age was 30-39.

All recruitment was once again done on MTurk using the same $0.25

compensation and recruitment message as experiment one. The same requirements of

having more than 50 previously completed HITs and having a HIT approval rate of over 95% were maintained for this study.

The major change in recruitment for experiment two was restricting participants to being within the United States. As mentioned above, my fear was that some of the messy data from experiment one was due to language barriers resulting from worldwide recruitment. In conversation with Will Dunlop I also discovered that there are large overseas populations that will use MTurk as an income and thus quickly race through easier HITs without paying attention to the actual content. This might have been another factor causing some of the difficulties with experiment one. Restricting recruitment to the United States limits many of these issues.

Material

The same narrative, argument, and control texts used in experiment one were used as stimuli in experiment two. Nothing from the results of experiment one called into question the usefulness or effectiveness of those texts.

The main differences between experiments one and two are in the recruitment restrictions and the dependent variables or measures. Because of the promising results on questions one and two found in the first study, I decided to include more questions that get at the motivational state of participants with regard to charitable donations.

Additionally, question three from experiment one was dropped for this study and replaced with a hypothetical donation question.

Participants in each condition were asked the following questions:

1. *It is morally good to give money to charities that help those in extreme poverty.*

2. *People like me should give money to charities that help people in extreme poverty.*

3. *Currently I feel motivated to give money to a charity that helps people in extreme poverty.*

4. *Right now, I have no desire to give money to a charity that helps people in extreme poverty.*

5. *I think it is important to support charities that help those struggling with extreme poverty.*

6. *Hypothetically, suppose we gave you an additional $10 for participation in this study, along with the option to donate some portion of it to one of six well-known charities that have been shown to effectively fight suffering due to extreme poverty. In this hypothetical case, how much of your additional $10 do you think you would donate?*

Questions one through five all aim to get a more complete picture of attitudes, beliefs, and motivational changes with regard to donating to charities that help fight extreme poverty. Respectively, the questions investigate feelings on the moral worth of charity,

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beliefs about the normativity of giving, motivation to give, desire to give, and the importance of giving. Individually, these questions try to capture the different ways participants might think about giving to charity. Collectively, these five questions give the study much more power than the two questions in experiment one. Participants are asked to respond to these 5 questions on the same 7-point Likert scale discussed in experiment one.

The sixth question poses a hypothetical question to participants and asks them to indicate the amount they would be willing to donate on an 11-point scale from $0 to $10 at full $1 intervals. As opposed to question three in experiment one, this question is far less demanding of participants. There is no outside work or actions required of the participants that might make them rate lower, for instance. Instead, I am solely asking about their hypothetical willingness to donate at that exact moment. Asking a hypothetical donation amount gives us some insight into how willing, at least at that moment, and at least with hypothetical money, the person is willing to give, and is one step further along the "belief to action" chain than questions one through five.

The rationale behind using a hypothetical question was addressed above, but it bears repeating to some degree here. In asking this question, I am not ultimately worried about what the dollar value is. I'm interested in the relative value compared to the other conditions and what that might mean for the participants' motivations to give to charity and their overall feelings, beliefs, and intentions. For these purposes, I believe a hypothetical donation design is an acceptable choice.

All other material, including transportation scale, consent form, demographic questions, and all instructions remain the same between experiments one and two.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through MTurk, limited to workers in the United States, and sorted into one of four conditions where they were presented with the narrative, the argument, both the narrative and argument, or the control text. They were then asked the five questions about their views on giving to charity, followed by the hypothetical donation scenario. After this they were given the 11-question transportation questionnaire, followed by the exclusion question (or questions in the case of the narrative and argument condition), and finally they were asked the demographic questions. Participants were then asked to input their MTurk worker identification number to ensure they received compensation on MTurk.

Results and Discussion

The goals of experiment two were to clean up the design of experiment one, replicate with cleaner data the results of experiment one that showed narrative outperforming argument and control with regard to shifting attitudes towards charitable donations, and to see if these results could be applied to a hypothetical donation scenario. I hypothesized that narrative would continue to increase motivation

to give to charities across all measures and that those exposed to narrative would choose to donate more of their hypothetical endowment than those exposed to both control and argument only conditions.

The data of anyone failing a comprehension question was thrown out and not used in analysis. Similar to experiment one, more participants failed the comprehension tests in the narrative and narrative +argument conditions than in the argument and control conditions. This is likely due to the complexity of the narrative and the fact that the comprehension test asks for an easily overlookable detail (where Mamtha's family worked). After experiment one I considered making this comprehension question easier, but ultimately decided that I wanted to be sure all included data came from participants who paid close enough attention to the text as to retain this information. The question deals with a rather important plot point of the story, and any participants who were seriously imagining the depicted scenes should be able to remember this point. Also, the conditions still all filled to over 200 a piece without severe differences in N between conditions, so statistical analysis should not be compromised. Sample sizes were argument N=295, control N=254, narrative N=250, and narrative + argument N=224.

I again ran a series of one-way ANOVA tests on each of the 5 motivation measures, as well as on the hypothetical donation question. The mean results of those questions on a 7-point Likert scale were as follows:

Q1. It is morally good to give to charities

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	6.081	1.107
Control	6.095	1.057
Narrative	6.356	.886
Narrative + Argument	6.379	.968

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F=6.47, p<.001).

Q2. People like me should give to charities

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	5.356	1.454
Control	5.399	1.418
Narrative	5.744	1.238
Narrative + Argument	5.683	1.415

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3,1019], F=5.19, p=.001).

Q3. Currently, I feel motivated to give to charity

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	4.736	1.823
Control	4.787	1.707
Narrative	5.416	1.487
Narrative + Argument	5.174	1.759

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F=9.43, p<.001).

Q4. Right now, I have no desire to give to charity (reverse coded)

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	4.790	2.006
Control	4.830	1.838
Narrative	5.240	1.867
Narrative + Argument	5.183	2.024

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F=3.76, p=.011).

Q5. I think it is important to support charities

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	5.763	1.277
Control	5.767	1.277
Narrative	6.084	1.032
Narrative + Argument	6.067	1.179

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F=5.71, p=.001).

Although the results for each individual question are significantly different by condition, the mean values are rather close, making it difficult to see a clear picture of what is going on. However, if we pool the individual result to get a combined "Motivation Score" ranging from 5-35, the trends begin to pop out more clearly.

Motivation Score

Condition	Mean Motivation Score	Standard Deviation
Argument	26.725	6.437
Control	26.898	5.996
Narrative	28.840	5.437
Narrative + Argument	28.487	6.103

Again, viewing the information in bar chart form helps make the differences in groups more immediately obvious.
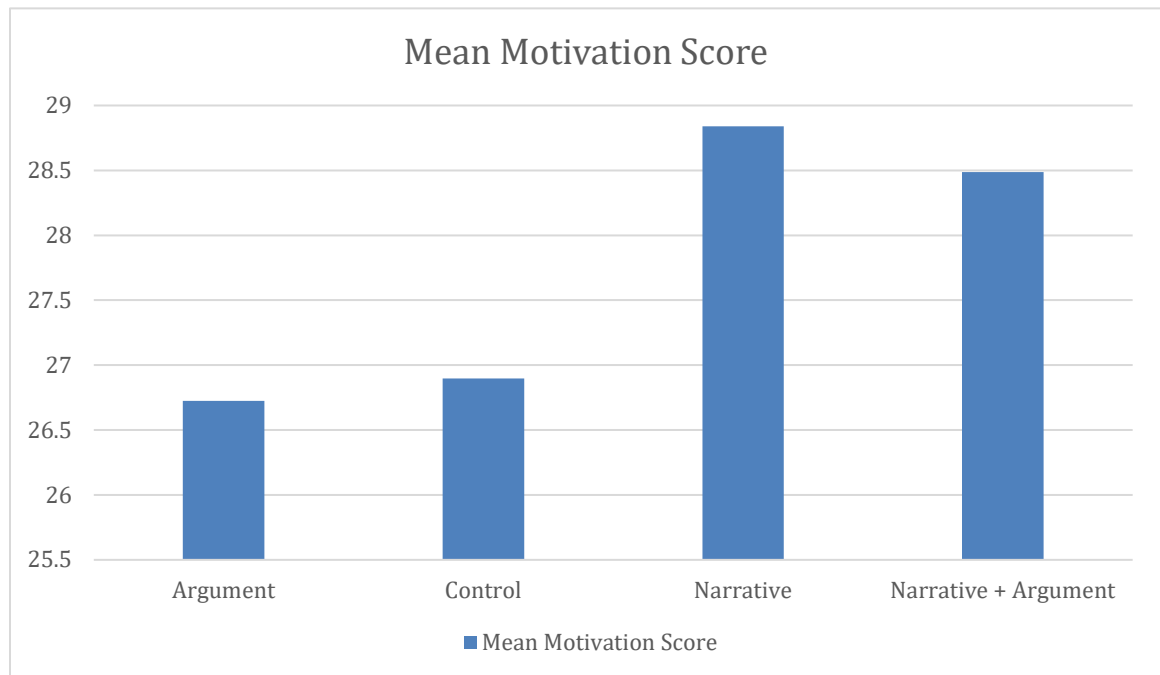

Figure 3.2
Mean motivation score by condition for experiment two.

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F= 8.33, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test, I find that there is no significant difference between the control and argument conditions and no significant difference between narrative and narrative + argument, but that these groups are significantly different from one another.

Next, I took a look at the hypothetical donation question. Here, participants were asked to consider how much of a hypothetical $10 bonus they would give to a charity of their choice. The results on a $0 to $10 scale were as follows:

Q6. Hypothetical $10 endowment

Condition	Mean Donation	Standard Deviation
Argument	$5.33	3.401
Control	$4.86	3.076
Narrative	$6.21	3.042
Narrative + Argument	$6.38	3.311

In bar graph form we begin to see the same grouping as in the overall motivation score:
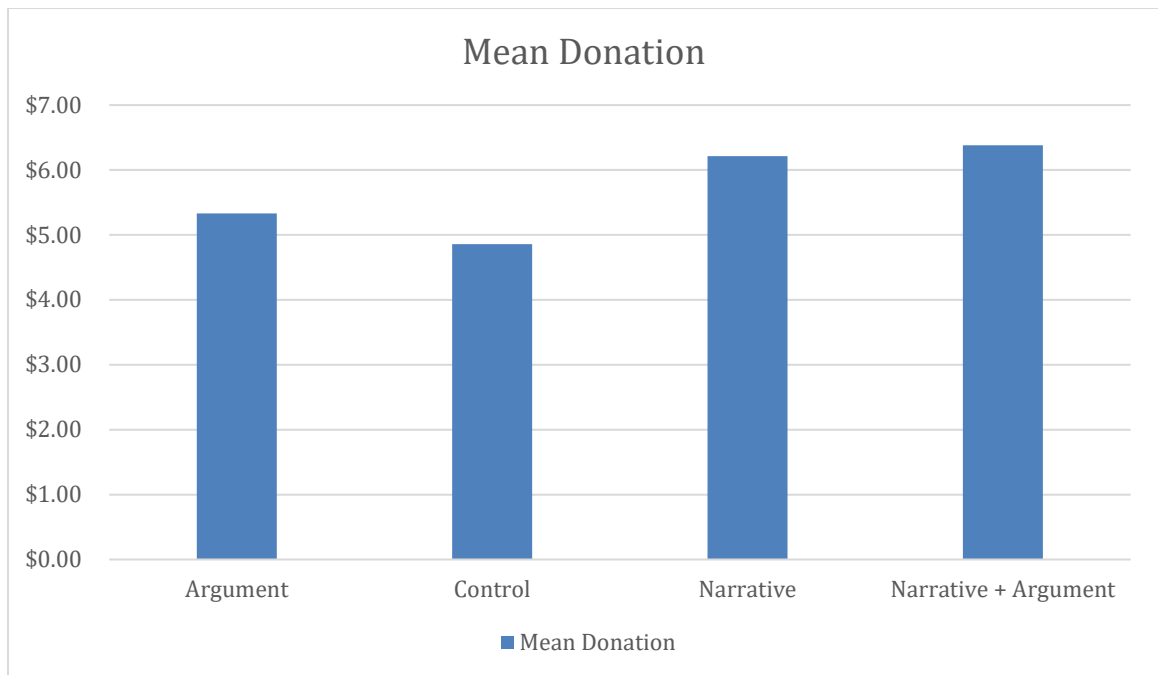
Figure 3.3
Mean donation by condition for experiment two.

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F=12.42, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test I find again that there is no significant different between the argument and control conditions and no significant difference between narrative and narrative + argument conditions, but also find that these two groups are significantly different from one another.

Turning briefly back to narrative transport we find a more pronounced result than in experiment one:

Transport Score by Condition

Condition	Mean Transport Score	Standard Deviation
Argument	52.085	9.763
Control	49.319	9.208
Narrative	56.772	8.910
Narrative + Argument	56.219	9.54

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 1019], F=35.42, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test I find the same grouping as the previous Tukey tests, with the narrative conditions and the non-narrative conditions being significantly different. Additionally, transport score moderately correlates with hypothetical donation both overall between all participants and within just the narrative conditions (p<.001 for both scenarios).

Donation rates were $1.18 cents higher amongst those participants in a condition that exposed them to a narrative, and these results are significantly different in a two-sample T-test (two-sample t[1006] = -5.84, p<.001). Mean donation in narrative conditions was $6.29 with a standard deviation of $3.17 and mean donation in non-narrative conditions was $5.11 with a standard deviation of $3.26.

These results are in line with and expand upon the findings in experiment one, that the chosen narrative outperforms both control and a Singer-style argument when it comes to motivating charitable donation. Additionally, it shows that exposure to the

chosen narrative results in higher levels of hypothetical donation than exposure to a Singer-style argument. Finally, narrative transport was significantly predictive of both motivation ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$) and donation amount ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = .007$) in this hypothetical endowment situation, whereas condition was not in either case (for motivation $\beta = -0.17$, $p = .284$, for donation amount $\beta = 0.34$, $p = .062$).

What is perhaps most interesting in these results is that argument appears to have little to no effect in either increasing motivation to give or increasing levels of hypothetical donation. If argument were to make a significant difference, we would have expected to see a boosting effect to the narrative + argument condition brought about by the inclusion of an argument, or at the very least we should have expected to see the argument condition outperform control.

However, as the results indicate, argument is not significantly different than control, and narrative + argument is not significantly different from narrative. This was the anticipated result, but it is still slightly alarming to see it play out in multiple studies, and so cleanly in experiment two. That a Singer-style argument did no better than a random middle school science text in moving opinions on charitable donations is interesting and potentially troubling.

That being said, some other interesting things are observed in the data. For instance, I find it interesting that the mean donation level for control is just below $5. Although the standard deviation is relatively high compared to the mean, this does indicate that the average tendency of participants is to roughly split the $10 between

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themselves and charity, before introduction of a narrative intervention. A cynical view of people might have predicted a lower mean donation level, so the roughly midpoint mean donation is a bit heartwarming.

A second point to note is that the effect size is relatively small, with narrative inspiring roughly $1 more on average. Argument may not be able to move the donation needle at all, but narrative doesn't seem to move it by a drastic amount either. Although, the scale of the hypothetical situation needs to be taken into account here. If we compare the mean donation rate for participants in the narrative condition and compare it to the mean for the control condition, we see a roughly 22% increase in donations. Viewed in this way, we can easily see the importance of such an effect if the dollar values are increased. After all, a 22% increase could turn a possible $1,000,000 donation into a $1,220,000 donation. That additional $220,000, of course, could make a monumental difference in saving real human lives.

Experiment Three

The goal of experiment three was to see if I could replicate the success of experiment two but with a real money lottery design rather than a hypothetical donation design. Instead of asking participants what they would do with a hypothetical $10, experiment three informs participants that they have a one in ten chance of being selected to receive an additional $10 credited to their MTurk account. It then asks how

much of that $10 they would like to donate in the case that they are one of the

participants chosen to receive the extra $10.

The hope of the study is that $10 will hold real weight for MTurk workers and

thus put participants to a real decision as to how much they would like to hold on to

versus donate. In a study conducted in 2017 that analyzed 2,676 workers performing 3.8

million tasks on MTurk, the median hourly wage was roughly $2 an hour, with only 4%

of workers making more $7.25 an hour.[180] In light of this, a bonus of $10 could

represent five hours of work to the average MTurk worker. This, I believe, is enough to

make the decision weighty enough. Each dollar a participant decides to donate is a

significant amount of time saved on the MTurk platform.[181]

Of course, this is only the case if the participants feel it is a real possibility that

they could win the lottery. Conventional wisdom might dictate that people play lotteries

all the time in full knowledge of how bad the odds are and that these people would not

spend the money to buy the tickets if they did not hold at least some belief that they

had a chance of winning high enough to warrant the spending of that money. Many

studies, for example Zenker et al. 2018, have shown that accurately informing

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[180] Hara, K., Adams, A., Milland, K., Savage, S., Callison-Burch, C., & Bigham, J. P. (2018, April). A data-driven analysis of workers' earnings on Amazon Mechanical Turk. In Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-14).
[181] I should note here that I feel absolutely horrible that MTurk workers make such a small amount of money. I also worry that this part of my experimental design is in some way exploiting this fact for my own benefit. Although I can't quite shake that feeling, at least the existence of the study gives the chance of additional money being distributed to 10% of those that participate.

individuals of the odds in government lotteries does not affect the willingness to buy

lottery tickets.[182]

The point here is that even in situations where the odds are objectively terrible,

and individuals are adequately informed about and understand those odds, people take

the chance of winning lotteries seriously, at least insofar as they are willing to pay to

enter them. Given that, a one in ten chance of winning what is for an MTurk worker a

somewhat substantial sum should, at least for the duration of the survey, create enough

weight as to make the participant take the decision give up a portion of that winning

seriously.

To help fund the higher costs brought about by the lottery component, I

partnered with The Life You Can Save (TLYCS), an organization founded by Peter Singer

that aims to advance and research ideas surrounding effective altruism.[183] TLYCS was

impressed with the promising results from experiment two and was eager to fund

research that might tell us more about what is effective in getting people to give more

to effective charities that combat extreme poverty.

The funding was in no way contingent upon any particular findings, and aside

from a few small tweaks and requests that will be discussed below, no large demands

were made as to the design of the survey. In fact, TLYCS was fully aware that

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[182] Juliane Zenker, Andreas Wagener, Sebastian Vollmer, Better Knowledge Need Not Affect Behavior: A Randomized Evaluation of the Demand for Lottery Tickets in Rural Thailand, The World Bank Economic Review, Volume 32, Issue 3, October 2018, Pages 570–583,
[183] Visit thelifeyoucansafe.org to learn more about their mission and to effectively donate to help people around the world in extreme poverty.

experiments one and two utilized an argument inspired and approved by Peter Singer himself and that my results show that Singer's argument is in fact less effective in swaying beliefs, attitudes, and intentions about donating to charity than narrative. In personal correspondence, Singer expressed sadness that his argument was not performing better, but excitement in the prospects of new data to better determine what is effective at increasing the rate of charitable donations.

All of this is to say that I in no way feel that the funding provided by TLYCS put any pressure on me to report a particular set of results. On the contrary, I was impressed by the organization's excitement for data that might even undermine strategies they themselves employ. TLYCS is an organization that began as a way to spread the ideas found in Singer's book of the same name, and arguments like those used in my study provide the backbone for that book.

Methods

Medium

MTurk and SurveyMonkey proved to be effective and efficient platforms for experiments one and two and were carried over into experiment three.

Participants and Recruitment

A total of 917 participants took part in this study, after removing participants with incomplete surveys and those who failed the comprehension test. As with experiment one, all participants were randomly sorted into one of four conditions using a sorting system created in SurveyMonkey. 530 participants identified as female, 386 identified as male, and 1 chose other or failed to identify. The median age was 30-39.

All recruitment was once again done on MTurk using the same $0.25 compensation and recruitment message as experiment two. The same requirements of having more than 50 previously completed HITs and having a HIT approval rate of over 95% were maintained for this study. The restriction of only accepting participants from the United States was also carried over from experiment two.

Material

The stimulus, including narrative, argument, and control texts, remained the same between experiments one, two, and three. For experiment three, the line "some participants may receive additional money" was added to the consent form after disclosure of the $0.25 compensation rate to account for the new lottery design.

Questions one through five remain the same from experiment two to experiment three with one small exception. TLYCS requested that the word "extreme" be removed from the questions so that they refer to simply "poverty" instead of "extreme poverty." The reason for this change is that TLYCS wanted participants to be

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able to choose between both foreign and domestic charities when deciding where their potential winnings might go. Since domestic charities are not combating "extreme poverty" in the strictest sense of the words, it made sense to remove that word from the questions.

As discussed above, the hypothetical donation question was replaced by a prompt detailing the lottery. Question six was changed to the following:

6. *Upon completion of this study, 10% of participants will receive an additional $10. You have the option to donate some portion of this $10 to one of six well-known charities that have been shown to effectively fight for suffering due to poverty. If you are one of the recipients of the additional $10, the portion you decide to keep will appear as a bonus credited to you Mechanical Turk account, and the portion you decide to donate will be given to the charity you pick from the list below. If you are one of the recipients of the additional $10, how much of your additional $10 would you like to donate?*

Participants were again asked to indicate on an 11-point scale at $1 intervals from $0 to $10 how much they would be willing to donate. On the next page, participants were presented with the following choice and information:

7. Which charity would you like your chosen donation to go to?

  i. Feeding America

  ii. National Federation of the Blind

  iii. Against Malaria Foundation

  iv. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition

  v. Homes for Our Troops

  vi. Helen Keller International

Charity Mission Statements

National Federation of the Blind (USA): "Integrating the blind into society on the basis of equality."

Against Malaria Foundation: "To provide funding for long-lasting insecticide-treated net (LLIN) distribution (for protection against malaria) in developing countries."

Feeding America: "To feed America's hungry through a nationwide network of food banks and engage our country in the fight to end hunger."

Helen Keller International: "Save the sight and lives of the world's most vulnerable and disadvantaged."

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition: "To tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition around the world."

Homes for Our Troops (USA)*: "To build mortgage free, specially adapted*

homes nationwide for severely injured veterans post-9/11, to enable them to

rebuild their lives."

Question six was crafted so that it adequately informed participants about how

the additional $10 payment would be distributed. Based on lessons learned in

experiment one, I tried to make this process demand as little from participants as

possible. However, I wanted to leave open the options for additional research and

information if participants desired. Each choice under question six was itself a hotlink

that opened the webpage for the charitable organization in a new window. Additionally,

a shortened version of the mission statement of each organization was displayed below,

allowing participants to quickly and easily get a feel for what each charity is about.

This also helps participants understand whether the charity primarily focuses on

domestic or foreign issues. Since recruitment to the study was limited to the United

States, I am in the position to not only determine whether narrative outperforms

argument in terms of motivating charitable donations, but also to see whether

participants favor charities that primarily combat poverty within their home country or

in a more global sense.

This was a request made by TLYCS, but one that fits nicely with my own research

interests. TLYCS is interested in effective altruism, which is the concept of using data

and reason to determine the most efficient ways to give to charity. In other words,

effective altruism is about finding how to save the most people with the lowest dollar

amount. As a matter of course, it is generally less expensive to save or improve lives in

the developing world. As such, TLYCS is interested in discovering ways of influencing

people to give to such charities. Since my research involves using a narrative involving

individuals in India, it is an interesting research question to ask whether exposing United

States citizens to a narrative about someone in a foreign country influences them to

donate to a charity that primarily focuses on issues in the developing world or if they

will still be more likely to donate to domestic charities.[184]

To test this, I chose three domestic charities and three international charities as

options. I avoided picking charities with extreme visibility to try and avoid any strong

trend towards participants choosing based solely on recognizability. This ruled out

charities like OXFAM, UNICEF, and Make-A-Wish, for example. Also, I wanted to focus

on charities that are in line with the effective altruism mission of TLYCS, which also ruled

out charities like Make-A-Wish.

To make the identification of a domestic versus international charity easier for

participants, I tried to pick charities that had clues to their global or domestic reach

within the title itself. For example, National Federation of the Blink, Feeding America,

and Homes for Our Troops all contain the clue words "national," "America," and "Our."

Likewise, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Helen Keller International contain

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[184] The prevailing wisdom is that individuals in the US are more motivated to give to domestic charities. This is backed up by many studies, for example Hart & Robson 2019.

the clue words "Global" and "International." "Against Malaria Foundation" is the only

one without a clear clue word in the title. However, one could argue that "malaria" is

itself a clue word for participants from the United States, as malaria is widely known in

the US to be an issue that charities fight in an international rather than domestic

context.

To help in this further, the addition of the parenthetical "(USA)" was added after

"National Federation of the Blind" and "Homes for Our Troops" to drive the point home

that these are domestic-focused charities. Furthermore, I was sure to include wordage

in the mission statements that further help to identify the charity as domestic or

international, in addition to simply giving information about the mission of the charities.

Underneath this information, participants were also asked why they picked the

charity they chose and were invited to say as much or as little as they liked in a free-

response box. This was included to perhaps get more information about the decision-

making processes of individuals when it comes to picking a charitable organization

generally and was not intended to be analyzed as a dependent variable in this study.

The final request by TLYCS was to have an option for participants to provide an

email address and sign up for newsletters from the organization. At the end of the

survey, after the demographics questions, participants were presented with the

following prompt, along with a free-response box:

Please enter your email address below if you would like to join the mailing list of

the non-profit group The Life You Can Save to receive information on how you

might help to effectively fight extreme poverty around the world.

Note: This is completely optional, and your email address will not be connected to

any of the other data collected in this study.

The text "The Life You Can Save" was also a hotlink that opened the organization's

website in a separate browser window. Because the request for an email address was

presented as optional, and that the request comes after the collection of all dependent

variables, I do not believe its inclusion affected the results in any way.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through MTurk, limited to workers in the United

States, and sorted into one of four conditions where they were presented with the

narrative, the argument, both the narrative and argument, or the control text. They

were then asked the five questions about their views on giving to charity, followed by

the lottery donation scenario. Once they decided how much of their potential $10 they

would donate, participants were asked to pick one of six charities to donate to and were

shown information about those six charities to help make the decision. The charity

choices, as well as the charity information, was displayed on the same page as the

prompt asking how much money they would like to donate. They were also asked to

explain why they picked the charity they chose. After this, they were given the 11-question transportation questionnaire, followed by the exclusion question (or questions in the case of the narrative and argument condition), and finally they were asked the demographic questions. Participants were then asked to in put their MTurk worked identification number to ensure they received compensation on MTurk.

Results and Discussion

The goal of this experiment was to replicate the findings in experiment two with a lottery design rather than a hypothetical endowment design. My hypothesis was that narrative conditions would continue to outperform argument and control conditions with regard to both shifting attitudes and motivation to give to charities as well as in higher rates in the lottery donation scenario. Additionally, I hypothesized that narrative transport would be the primary predictor of both overall motivation score and donation amount.

Data from participants who failed a comprehension test were thrown out and not used in the analysis for this experiment. Due to higher rates of comprehension question failure, I needed to reopen access to the survey on MTurk after the initial data collection period had ended. An additional 250 participants were run through the experiment after the initial 800 to ensure that the target number of participants were present in each condition. After accounting for incomplete surveys and failures of

comprehension tests, sample sizes were argument N=276, control N=210, narrative

N=217, and narrative + argument N=214.

I ran another series of AVOVA tests for each of the motivation questions with the

results as follows:

Q1. It is morally good to give to charities

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	5.986	1.166
Control	6.067	1.139
Narrative	6.341	.950
Narrative + Argument	6.350	1.027

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3,

913], F=7.13, p<.001).

Q2. People like me should give to charities

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	5.138	1.610
Control	5.310	1.433
Narrative	5.783	1.324
Narrative + Argument	5.799	1.428

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3,913], F=12.48, p<.001).

Q3. Currently, I feel motivated to give to charity

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	4.681	1.876
Control	4.676	1.766
Narrative	5.226	1.661
Narrative + Argument	5.210	1.741

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F=7.07, p<.001).

Q4. Right now, I have no desire to give to charity (reverse coded)

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	3.612	2.102
Control	3.805	2.044
Narrative	3.313	2.170
Narrative + Argument	3.402	2.170

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are not significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F=2.32, p=.073).

Q5. I think it is important to support charities

Condition	Mean	Standard Deviation
Argument	5.612	1.444
Control	5.757	1.163
Narrative	6.065	1.065
Narrative + Argument	6.070	1.117

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F=8.39, p<.001).

The outlier in this group is the reverse coded question number four. In experiment two, question four was the weakest of the batch with p=.011, but the results were still statistically significant when compared against condition. In experiment three, however, question four the conditions are not only not significantly different, but the mean values seem to be trending in the opposite direction it did in experiment two.

Comparing the data from experiments two and three across all questions other than four, the mean values for each condition never differ by more than 4%. In fact, the mean values per condition are remarkably stable from experiment to two experiment

three. In question four, however, mean values differ by up to 36% between experiments two and three. Clearly, something went haywire with question four in this experiment.

I verified that the data for question four was properly reverse coded in SurveyMonkey and that the data was transferred faithfully to all spreadsheets. While looking over the raw data, however, I noticed that there were a large number of participants who indicated that they completely agreed with both questions three and four. In essence, they reported both that they felt motivated to give money to charity and that they had no desire to give money to charity. The rest of the data for these participants looked to be genuine, so it is unlikely these are all the results of participants not taking the survey seriously and simply marking the maximum option for every question. Additionally, these participants all passed the comprehension test, and the correct answer on the comprehension test was not the final choice.

Whereas it's possible that a participant might make a significant distinction between desire and motivation and thus faithfully represent their views by completely agreeing with the statements in both questions three and four, it is highly unlikely. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that such a large number of participants would feel this way. In fact, far more participants indicated agreement to both questions three and four than indicated agreement to three and disagreement to four, or vice versa. Because of this, the simplest explanation would be that, for some reason, many participants misread the question, possibly by overlooking the word "not," and mistakenly responded favorably to question four. That this was also the weakest result on

experiment two leads me to think this as well. I believe this problem could possibly be rectified for future studies with a reformatting of how the question is worded or presented.

As a result, I decided to leave question four out of the calculation of the overall motivation score. With four other questions still attacking the motivational mindset of participants from other angles, I believe there is still sufficient statistical power to afford removing the troubling question and proceeding as intended.

For transparency's sake, here are the overall motivation scores before removing question 4:

Motivation Scores with Q4

Condition	Mean Motivation Score	Standard Deviation
Argument	25.029	4.942
Control	25.614	4.255
Narrative	26.728	3.968
Narrative + Argument	26.832	4.435

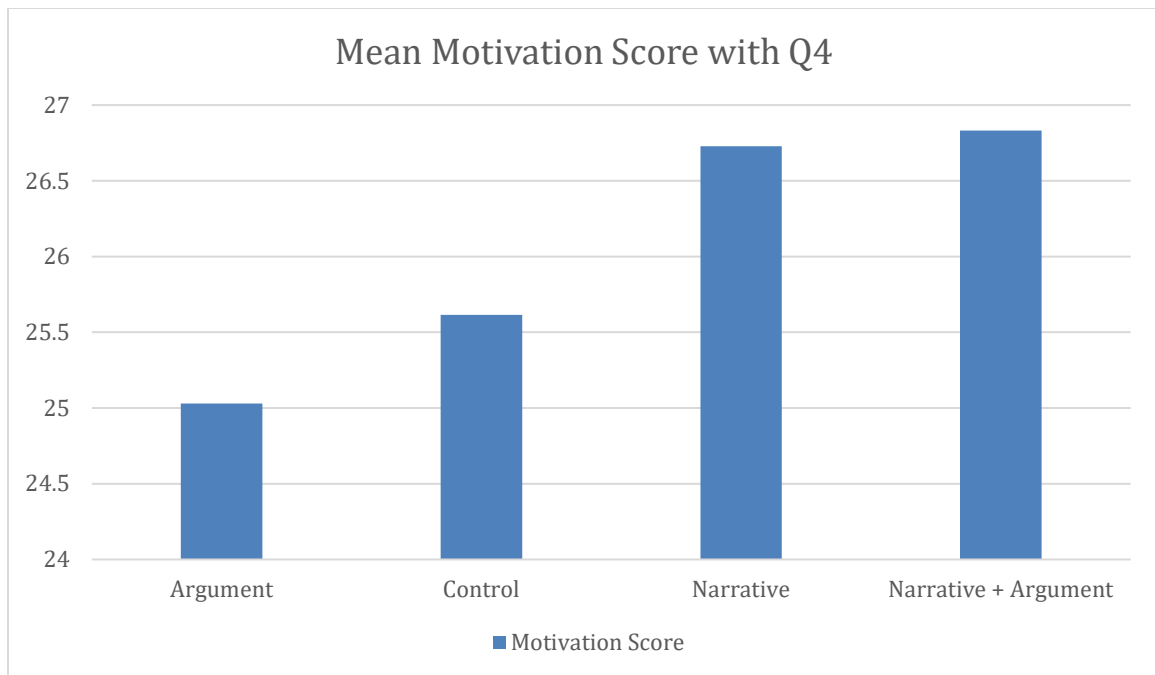Here is the information presented in graph form:

Figure 3.4
Mean motivation score by condition with Q4 values included for experiment three.

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are still significantly different before removing question 4 (ANOVA [3, 913], F= 9.33, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test, I find that there is no significant difference between the control and argument conditions and no significant difference between narrative and narrative + argument, but that these groups are significantly different from one another. However, the Tukey does show that while control is significantly different from narrative and narrative + argument, it is barely so.

I find the same result when question 4 is removed, but the difference between groups is much cleaner. The overall motivation score on a scale of 4-28 is as follows:

	Motivation Score	
Condition	**Mean Motivation Score**	**Standard Deviation**
Argument	21.417	5.228
Control	21.810	4.513
Narrative	23.415	4.247
Narrative + Argument	23.430	4.631

With the noise from question 4 removed from the overall motivation score we again see the same pattern we saw in experiment two:
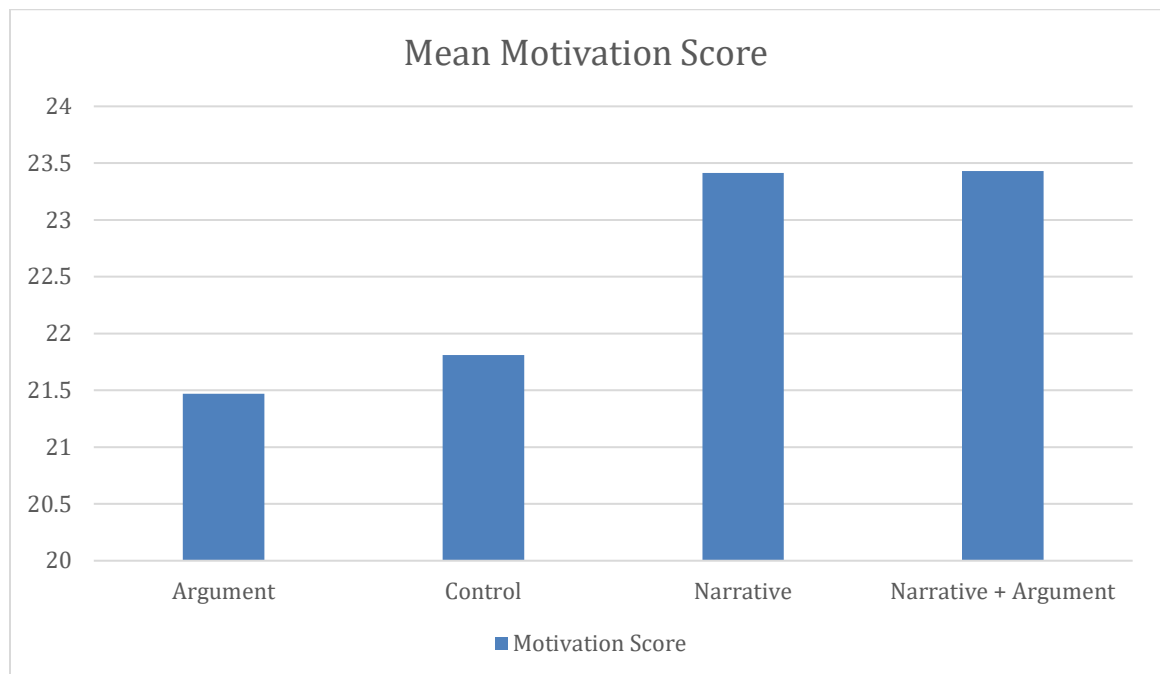

Figure 3.5
Mean motivation score by condition with Q4 values removed for experiment three.

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F= 11.86, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test, I find again that there is no significant difference between the control and argument conditions and no significant difference between narrative and narrative + argument, but that these groups are significantly different from one another. However, with question 4 removed the conditions are much farther apart in the Tukey.

With regard to mean donations in the lottery question, the results are as follows:

Q6. $10 lottery donation

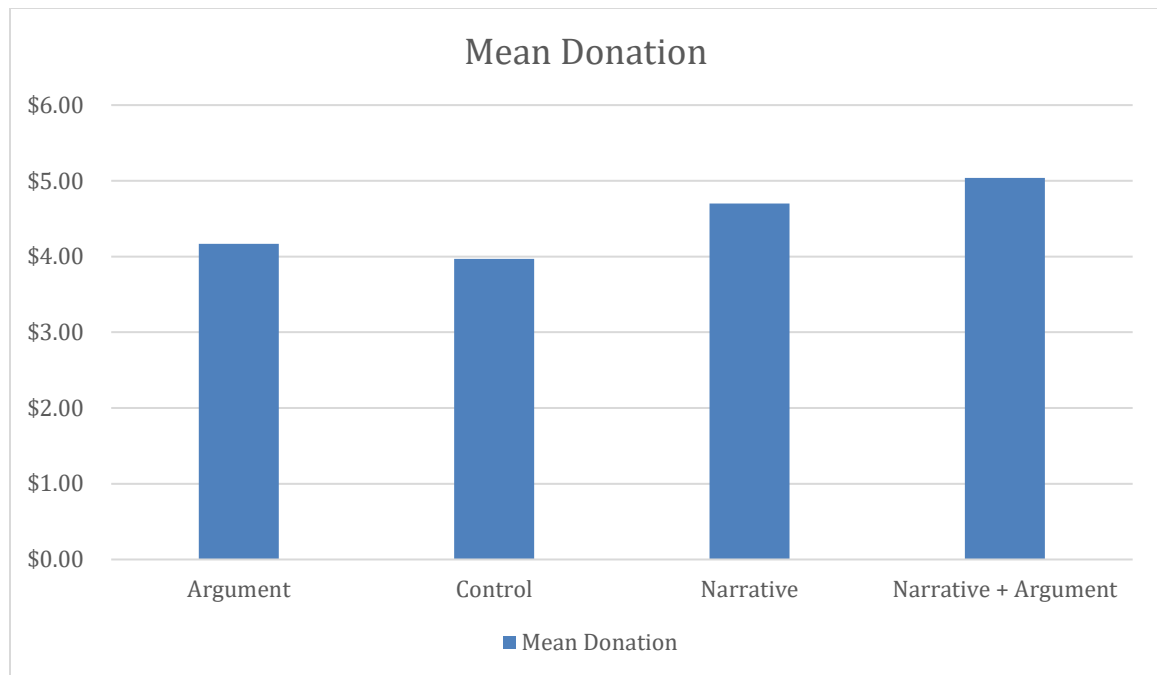| Condition	Mean Donation	Standard Deviation
Argument	$4.17	3.316
Control	$3.97	3.058
Narrative	$4.70	3.204
Narrative + Argument	$5.04	3.361

Figure 3.6
Mean donations by condition for experiment three.

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F=4.99, p=.002). On this question, running a post-hoc Tukey test gives an interesting result: only the argument + narrative condition is significantly different from the others, with all other conditions not being significantly different from one another. However, in a two-sample T-test comparing participants in a narrative condition versus a non-narrative condition, the groups are significantly different (T-Test [896], T=-3.65, p<.001) with mean donation values of $4.08 in non-narrative conditions and $4.87 in narrative conditions.

Running a regression analysis also supports the findings in the two-sample T-test. Transport was significantlly predictive of donation amount (β = 0.03, p = .034) but

condition was not (β = 0.17, p = .070). Although not as striking as the results in experiment two, these findings are consistent with what was found there and suggest that transportation is doing the work.

I once again am interested in the role of narrative transport in this study. Transport score by condition was as follows:

Transport Score by Condition

Condition	Mean Transport Score	Standard Deviation
Argument	46.634	10.054
Control	44.443	7.762
Narrative	49.548	8.016
Narrative + Argument	48.925	8.703

In a one-way ANOVA test the conditions are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F=15.11, p<.001). Running a post-hoc Tukey test I find the same grouping as the previous Tukey tests, with the narrative conditions and the non-narrative conditions being significantly different. Additionally, transport score again moderately correlates with hypothetical donation both overall between all participants and within just the narrative conditions (p<.001 for both scenarios).

I also analyzed whether exposure to narrative had an impact on the participant choosing to donate to a national versus an international charity:
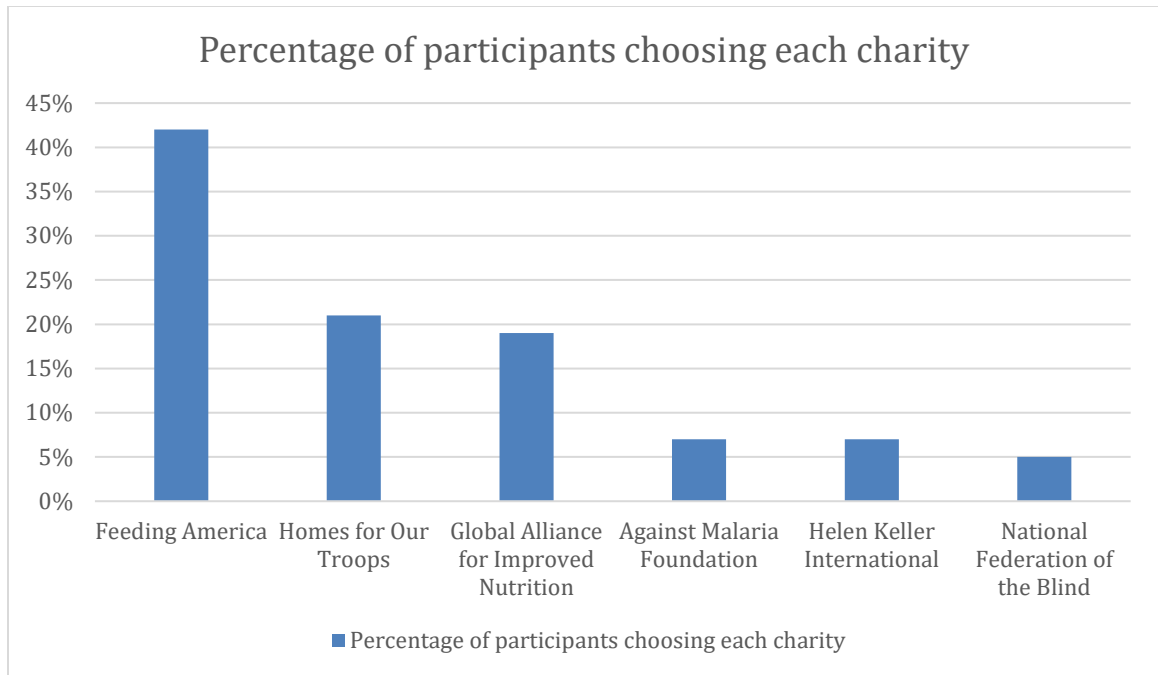
Figure 3.7
Percentage of participants choosing each charity in experiment three.

And here is the percentage of participants in each condition who gave to an international charity:
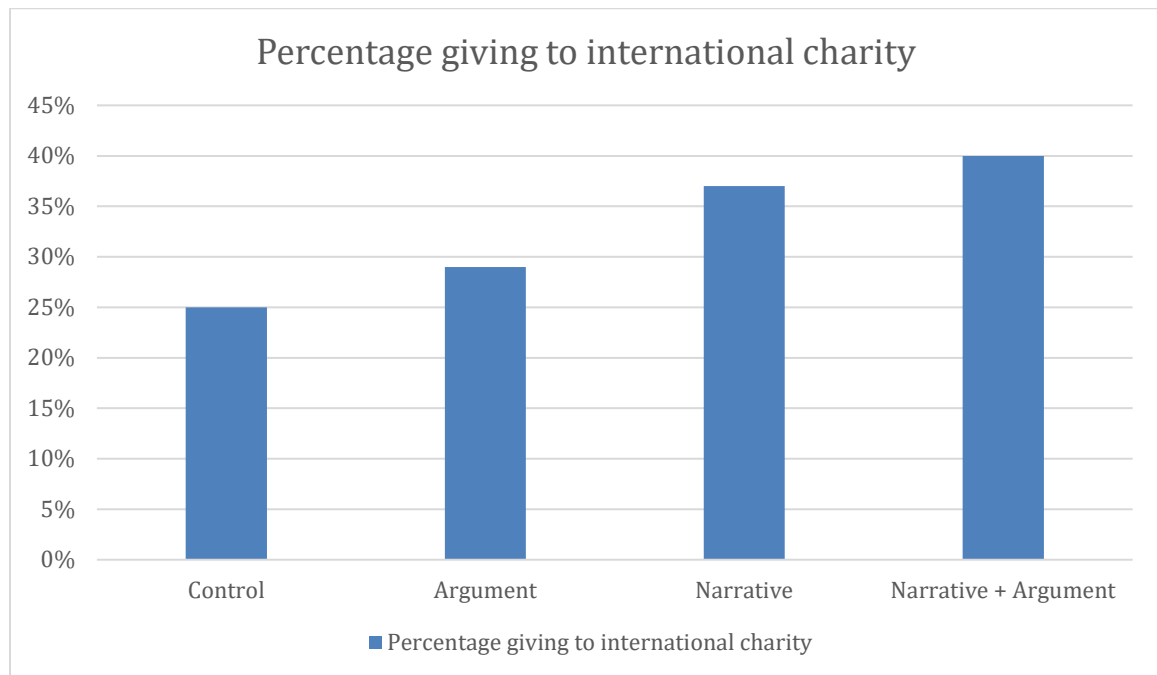

Figure 3.8
Percentage of participants giving to international charity by condition in experiment three.

In general, participants strongly favored national charities. However, when broken down by percentage of participants giving to an international charity by condition, the groups are significantly different (ANOVA [3, 913], F=5.05, p=.002. A chi-square test of independence was performed to confirm this, and the distribution of chosen charities by condition was in fact significant (chi-square [3, 914], 14.98, p=.002).

Overall, these results replicate and confirm many of the findings from experiment two. Those exposed to narrative had more favorable beliefs and attitudes

towards charitable donation than those exposed to a Singer-style argument aimed at persuading people to give to charities. Exposure to the narrative also resulted in higher levels of donating portions of a potential $10 lottery win. Furthermore, this study showed that narrative transport was the primary predictor in donation amount and that exposure to narrative resulted in higher degrees of narrative transportation.

An interesting note is that the mean donation amounts were significantly lower in study three than in study two. In fact, donations were on average 22% lower than in the previous study. Although this might immediately seem puzzling, it makes more sense when we also consider that overall transportation scores for this study were 12% lower than in the previous study. Since transportation is a predictor of donation, it makes sense that a lower level of overall transportation would result in a lower level of overall donations.

The real puzzle then becomes why there was a lower level of transport in this study than in previous studies. Because transport can be mediated by many factors not studied in this experiment, such as education, familiarity with story topic, distractions in the room, and their overall transportability, it is difficult to answer this question. I do not, however, think this poses a problem for the studies. This series of experiments have merely set out to show that narrative is better at triggering narrative transport than arguments, and that narrative transport can predict changes in moral attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. The results from these experiments continue to suggest that both of these claims are true.

General Discussion

Taken collectively, these three experiments contribute to and build upon the literatures of numerous disciplines. Beginning with the existing research on narrative transport, my studies have replicated a number of findings that reinforce what is already known about narrative transport and its effects. At a most basic level, all three studies have confirmed that reading narratives results in higher levels of narrative transport than reading non-narrative texts and that transport is not correlated with any of the demographic measures collected in this study. To my knowledge, no other studies on narrative transport have tested whether philosophical arguments elicit transportation and how those levels of transportation compare to classical narratives. These studies have all confirmed that narrative elements are required to trigger higher levels of absorption into a text and that narratives consistently beat philosophical argumentation with regard to inducing transport. This, I believe, reinforces the idea that narrative transport is a real, distinct phenomenon that tracks our levels of psychological engagement with texts that contain narrative structures and elements.

My studies have also confirmed that higher levels of narrative transportation predict higher degrees of story-consistent belief changes. The more someone was transported by each text, the more they reported beliefs that lined up with the beliefs embedded in the text. This, I believe, supports the existing findings on narrative transport and also supports my contention that narrative itself triggers transport while the content of the narrative determines how we are changed when we return from our

journey. In other words, my findings simultaneously support Nussbaum's contention that narratives have the ability to change us while also casting doubt on her optimism at its content-independent benefits.

Where my work begins to break new ground is in its findings that narrative transport can also impact what are arguably moral beliefs, intentions, and behaviors. It is one thing to show, as previous studies have, that narrative has the power to sway our beliefs and opinions about non-moral issues, but quite another, I believe, to show that narrative can also change aspects of our psychology that I believe are more central to the quality of our character. All three studies have shown that narrative transportation can result in story-consistent moral belief, attitude, and intention shifts, and study three begins to suggest that these shifts may bleed over into changes in our actual moral behavior.

Not only this, but when placed up against a classically celebrated philosophical argument aimed at swaying moral beliefs and behavior, narrative outperformed argument in every instance. Until now, no study has shown specifically that narrative can outperform philosophical argumentation when it comes to the swaying of moral beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and possibly behavior. These findings, I believe, have potentially dramatic repercussions for future study on narrative transportation specifically and persuasion broadly, as well as for philosophers interested in moral psychology, moral education and development, and pedagogy in general.

In what ways, for example, should instructors change the way they present material in light of these findings? Should this in any way impact the way philosophers write papers, books, and articles? I take it that one of the express purposes of many of these endeavors is to convince the reader of the truth or strength of that philosopher's position, and if narrative is better at achieving that, perhaps we as a discipline should begin moving away from classic arguments and more towards narrative. Will students understand or engage with material better if presented in narrative form rather than argument form? These are the sorts of questions these findings make me ask, and much more research needs to be done in order to answer them. Thankfully, I believe my research here provides some guidance on how that future research might be structured.

With regard to future study, much more needs to be done to determine exactly what it is about narrative that gives it its persuasive effect. I envision a battery of future studies that could zero in on the specific mechanism at work in the effects observed in these experiments. Perhaps it is the emotionally charged nature of the narrative used, or perhaps imagery alone could have the same or stronger impact on moral attitudes and behavior. Additionally, studies need to be done in which participants are given nearly identical narratives but with subtle wording shifts that change the imbedded beliefs within the narrative. Will these subtle content shifts result in opposite changes in moral belief and attitude shifts? I suspect they will, but my research here does nothing to answer these questions.

Although the findings and scope of my studies have been fairly small and modest, they have, in my estimation, potentially far-reaching implications. As exciting as my findings are, I can't help but feel a bit of trepidation at what they suggest. It is one thing to find that narratives can sway our attitudes towards running shoes or make us more likely to view a company in a favorable light, as many studies have previously shown. These sorts of things are likely superficial and not terribly troubling. It is quite another thing, I think, to find that narratives can so quickly and easily change something much more central to who we are, something that I argue is more central to our very identify. Whereas our views and beliefs about companies, products, or films might be collectively important to the types of people we are, I find our moral beliefs, attitudes, and behavior as far more central to our character, as revealing the quality of our inner being, to speak loosely. There is simply something more important, I contend, about our moral beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors than their non-moral counterparts, and the fact that narrative can also have an impact on those more important elements is as fascinating as it is scary.

In my final chapter, I would like to begin investigating the morality of using narrative transport to affect these central and important aspects of our moral character. As what has come to be known as the "Peter Parker Principle" tells us, with great power comes great responsibility, and we should take the time to carefully consider the ethics of using a tool that has the power to impact the very moral character of those who come into contact with it.

Chapter 4

The Ethics of Narrative Transportation

I'll tell you the problem with the scientific power that you're using here: it didn't require any discipline to attain it. You know, you read what others had done and you took the next step. You didn't earn the knowledge for yourselves, so you don't take any responsibility for it. You stood on the shoulders of geniuses to accomplish something as fast as you could and before you even knew what you had, you patented it, and packaged it, and slapped it on a plastic lunch box, and now you're selling it. . . Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could that they didn't stop to think if they should.

-Michael Crichton

Jurassic Park

Story Time with Chris

As you may have surmised by now, philosophy has always been a practical pursuit for me. It's not that I don't see the intrinsic value of philosophy, quite the contrary! I'm a strong believer in seeing the non-instrumental value of things, in much the same way that Nussbaum's concept of fancy asks us to see things as valuable in and of themselves. What I mean is that I've always made a conscious effort to incorporate

philosophical ideas and philosophical approaches to my everyday life. I strive to "see" philosophy everywhere around me, in my food, in my relationships, and in the very way I choose to live my life. At the risk of sounding cliché, philosophy has become more than a mere subject for me, it has become a way of life.

I would love to be able to say that it was something about philosophy itself that made me this way, but if I'm honest, I think I've always been obsessed with self-improvement to some degree or another. I distinctly remember being asked by my second-grade teacher what my favorite hobby was and seeing her confusion when I responded with "working on myself." I have a basic understanding of where this drive likely came from, a combination of psychological responses to unfortunate childhood events paired with a propensity for introspection, but I won't bore you with those things here.

When I was given the opportunity to begin actually teaching philosophy to undergraduate students, I wanted to find a way to convey this love of philosophy to them. I wanted to show them that philosophy could be so much more than just a class on their schedule, that it could be integrated into their lives in such a way as to enrich everything they do. I wanted them to see the world as I do, as being imbued with a deep tapestry of philosophical existence lying just below the surface. I wanted them to see philosophy everywhere.

So, in the spirit of Michel de Montaigne, I did the only thing I felt I was fully qualified to do: tell stories about how I saw philosophy manifest itself in my own

experiences. At the beginning of every discussion section (and subsequent classes) I

taught, I held what I began calling "story time with Chris" in which I told true stories

about my life that illustrated a concept, issue, or general principle we would be working

on that day. The goal of these stories was to give the students an access point to the

material, a point they could refer back to in order to better understand whatever it was

we were trying to understand as a group. To give you an idea of what these stories look

like, I'll tell my favorite one now:

My mother used to work for the Portland Trailblazers professional

basketball team as a media relations specialist. She worked in the stadium the

team played in and would often follow the team around the country on away

games, setting up interviews between the players and local media outlets. Of

course, this meant that she got to be pretty close with a lot of the players, and

even though I was never that interested in basketball, I have to admit that it was

pretty cool having a mother who got to hang out with people like Scottie Pippin

on a regular basis.

Well, one day one of the janitors who worked at the stadium approached

my mother and asked for a favor. The woman had worked in the building for

years but was going to be retiring in a few weeks, after which she would fly back

to live with her family in Mexico. What she wanted, more than anything, would

be to have some sort of memento of her time working for the team, something

she could put on her wall, look at fondly, and show off to people who came over to visit. Would it be possible, the woman asked, if my mother could get her a signed Scottie Pippin jersey? Pippin was always her favorite player, and it would mean the world to her.

Of course, my mother said she would be happy to! She knew Pippin well and knew he would have no problem doing that for an employee. My mother would make it happen the very next time she saw him. Unfortunately, my mother got busy with her work and her promise to fulfil the woman's wish completely slipped her mind until a few weeks later when she walked into the office and saw a banner congratulating the woman on her retirement. To make things worse, she knew the woman was planning on flying home the very next day and Scottie Pippin was with the team in another state at an away game my mother didn't go to.

My mother was faced with a tough decision: either break her promise and let this poor woman down or find another solution fast. She ran to her office where she had a bunch of team memorabilia and noticed that she had a basketball signed by Scottie Pippin. She also knew that the stadium had a store on the main level that sold team merchandise. Then it occurred to her: she could go to the team store, buy a Scottie Pippen jersey, bring it to her office, lay it next to the signed basketball, and do her best to mimic Pippin's signature. The woman

would be none the wiser and would, as far as she knew, have the prized

possession she always wanted.

And that's precisely what my mother did. She forged the signature, gave

the jersey to the woman, who was evidently thrilled with the gift, and the woman

flew off to Mexico the next day, supposedly never the wiser that her memento

wasn't genuine. Years later, over lunch with my mother during a visit home, she

tells me this story, beaming with pride over how masterfully she handled this

tricky situation. I sat there amazed at what I was hearing, wondering if my

mother had forgotten that I study ethics for a living. I asked her if she felt at all

guilty for what she had done. I'll never forget her answer, she said, "Chris, how

could this possibly have been wrong? You should have seen the look on her face.

She was so happy. If I told her the truth she would have been crushed, and she

will never find out that the signature isn't real. It isn't like her or any of her

friends are going to be experts at authenticating signatures! What good would

have come from me telling her I forgot? This way everyone is so much happier.

So, how was this possibly wrong?"

And so, I ask all of you: how could this possibly be wrong? What would

you have done in my mother's situation?

I've probably told this story over a dozen times in front of students now, and it

always sparks a very long and interesting conversation. Usually the first person

hesitantly raises her hand and prefaces her statement by saying she doesn't want to speak ill of my mother, at which point I make a joke about how horrible I think what she did was, and then the hands immediately start shooting up. Students who normally never speak during more traditional class discussions jump in and begin talking about the story. What considerations made my mother's actions good, what considerations made them bad, what alternatives were available, and why those alternatives might have been better or worse. With just very subtle directing on my part, students who had previously stated that they had no interest in philosophy and were only taking the class because it fit their schedule and filled an elective were suddenly engaging with the issues in thoughtful ways. Without even knowing it, the students actually begin *doing* philosophy. My attempt to get my students to see the world through my eyes was beginning to work.

Without even really knowing it at the time, I had inadvertently stumbled upon the amazing power of narrative as a teaching tool. Students were far more engaged after story time with Chris than when I began a class by presenting material in a more traditional fashion, and that engagement carried through the rest of the class when I inevitably returned to those more traditional methods of discussing material. What I know now is that I was most likely utilizing narrative transport with my students, whisking their minds away to my narrative worlds and slightly changing them in

cognitive and affective ways in the process.[185] Unbeknownst to me, I was shifting their

beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and emotions to line up with those elements I had,

intentionally or not, built into the stories I told them. No story, I believe, is without

some sort of inherent bias towards one way of thinking or another, and my stories were

certainly no exception.

But this raises an important question for me: if narrative has the power to

change us in important ways, even, as I hope to have shown in chapter three, in ways

that impact our moral beliefs, intentions, and behavior, then is it ethically permissible to

use narrative for the express purpose of having these effects? Would it be wrong for a

government, an organization, a company, or even a teacher to use narrative specifically

to make the people experiencing that narrative have more story-consistent beliefs,

attitudes, intentions, or to alter their behavior? These sorts of questions, I believe, are

not asked enough, and it is precisely this issue that I will spend the final chapter of this

dissertation exploring.

If my view of the literary theory of mind is correct, that the form of narrative

itself is what cultivates the abilities found in Nussbaum's literary imagination while the

content is what ultimately directs those abilities, then the need for reflection on the

ethics of using narrative is particularly important. The specific changes that narratives

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[185] It is worth noting here that I am certainly not the first philosopher to try and use illustrations of some sort as a teaching tool. After all, examples and especially thought experiments likely tap into a very similar, if not identical, mechanism. However, I believe that specifically using narrative, with careful attention to what aspects of narrative best trigger narrative transport, is its own, and more powerful, approach. Thanks to Myisha Cherry for this point.

bring about in those who experience them are the result of the content of those narratives, and as such, we must pay special attention to how we construct and use narratives to sway the mental states and behavior of others.

The bottom line is this: the current research on narrative transport, including my own contributions in chapter three, suggest that narrative is a tremendously powerful tool. It has the ability to change people's beliefs, attitudes, and even behavior to correspond with whatever messages we embed within the content of that narrative. Nussbaum's claim that narratives, and particularly novels, should be used to educate citizens so that they may cultivate abilities that lead to flourishing within a civil, democratic society, remains, in my view, realistic and perhaps even advisable. However, and at the risk of being cliché, with great power comes great responsibility, and we must be careful in crafting the content of narratives that are deployed with the intention of changing people in such a deep and personal way.

In what follows, I will explore the potential problems with using narrative transport to intentionally influence a person's mental states and behavior by comparing transport to nudge theory, a concept that I argue poses similar ethical issues to narrative transport. Next, I will lay out the situations in which the intentional employment of narrative transport is both morally permissible and problematic. Finally, I will recommend some practical applications for my ethical view.

Marketing Morality and the Potential Problems with Narrative Transport

As seems fitting given the current topic of discussion, let's begin with a thought

experiment. Suppose I tell you that I have a magic book, one passed down from

generation to generation in my family. It's because of this book, I confide in you, that my

family has grown wealthy and prosperous over the past century. You see, this particular

book happens to have a very peculiar, and particularly useful, capability. The pages

within its cloth bindings are blank, but under the right conditions, they can spring to life

with stories of unbelievable power: stories that have the ability to make anyone believe,

feel, or intend anything you want. To unlock this power, one need only use a special

quill pen to ink the name of the person whose mind you wish to change followed by the

specific beliefs, attitudes, or intentions you want that person to have. Once this is done,

the ink will disappear, sinking into the page, and a story will then begin to appear on the

once blank pages. Then, all you need to do is have the target read the story and their

mind will be completely and forever changed, even if your chosen beliefs are absolutely

contrary to anything that person would have ever believed on her own. The beauty in

the magic book is that it works regardless of what the person's previous desires and

mental states might have been. The person has no choice in the matter! They read the

story and then "poof," they believe, feel, or intend whatever it is you want them to. No way to avoid it.

Clearly, such a magic book would be tremendously powerful. You could make anyone fall in love with you, become a titan of business and industry by always winning every key deal, acquire amazing political power by controlling votes in Congress and the Supreme Court, or just finally win that argument with your Uncle Jerry over who should have won the last season of *The Bachelor*. But as powerful as such a book would be, it should also be clear that to actually use its absolute, persuasive power would raise immediate ethical concerns. The changes in mental states experienced by those who read stories from the magic book would take place against their will, bypassing all normal means by which we think a person might freely come to her own conclusions. In fact, most would likely agree that the effects of this book would be more akin to "brainwashing" than any ethically acceptable form of persuasion, and most would object to having the magic book used on them against their will.

I can see situations in which particularly akratic individuals might want the book to be used on them for certain purposes, say, for making them believe that exercise is enjoyable or that they like eating fruit and vegetables. These sorts of cases would, of course, be in accordance with the person's wishes and therefore likely avoid ethical concerns (although some ethical concerns may still persist). Also, arguments could be made that the use of such a book might be permissible when it is overwhelmingly in the person's or society's best interest, even if it goes against the person's will. Here I am

thinking about situations in which the book makes homicidal or pedophilic individuals change their beliefs, desires, and intentions regardless of whether they want it done or not. Such considerations are legitimate and open for debate but go beyond the scope of my project here. I merely bring them up to concede that there are legitimate complications that could be brought up.

All that being said, the point should remain that using the magic book would, under most circumstances, be a paradigmatic example of a morally impermissible method of changing someone's mind. For the sake of balance, let's imagine a scenario on the opposite end of the spectrum. Suppose I come to you with a very similar magic book to the one presented in the first thought experiment except this magic book does nothing to your mental states directly. Rather, the magic book presents information about a topic of your choosing in a perfectly objective, non-biased sort of a way.[186] You need only take the quill pen, write down the subject you would like to research, and the book presents all of the information you need to come to a rational, self-directed conclusion. What makes this book so useful is that it anticipates exactly what information you will need to come to your own rational decision about the matter and avoids presenting anything that is irrelevant, superfluous, or will unduly sway you one way or the other. In other words, the book is able to tailor information specifically for

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[186] I'm skeptical that any information could be presented in a purely objective way but seeing as how this is a thought experiment with a "magic book," this suffices for the point I'm making.

you so that your own faculties operate perfectly to arrive you at a conclusion that could

in absolutely no way be seen as anything but thoroughly and deeply your own.[187]

Let's call the first magic book "Bad Book" and this second magic book "Good

Book." I take it that using Bad Book would be clearly morally wrong whereas using Good

Book would, at least plausibly, be clearly morally right. There is a general sense, at least

within the United States, I think, that people should be allowed to come to conclusions

by their own lights and that an ideal instance of persuasion is one in which one person

presents the cold, unbiased facts and the other uses her own rationality and

deliberative functions to come to "her own" decision. The concept of a decision being

fully your own is, on my analysis, one of the key factors that makes Bad Book so morally

reprehensible. In a very real sense, the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions a person has

after reading Bad Book are not their own but were implanted by the magical powers

wielded by the story. Good Book, however, merely magically presents the perfect set of

information to the reader, allowing that person to then come to her own conclusion. A

conclusion, by the way, that she set out to find by initiating the request for information

in the Good Book to begin with. These, I contend, are two radical extremes of the

spectrum of persuasion.

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[187] Again, this is likely impossible in reality. Without presenting every fact of the universe down to the location and speed of every atom some information must be omitted, and the decision to omit some facts while supplying others always contains someone amount of interpretation or assumption of values.

The question, then, is where does normal narrative transport fall on this spectrum? Is reading a story, being mentally swooped away to a narrative world, and being changed by that process more like the scenario in Bad Book, or is it closer on the spectrum to Good Book? Admittedly, the case for narrative transport does not immediately look good. Stories do not, after all, simply present facts and allow the reader to come to their own conclusions. Rather, they employ a host of techniques that many might consider "non-rational." The real question then becomes how far narrative travels along the persuasion spectrum and where and under what conditions we move from morally acceptable to morally impermissible tactics of persuasion.

The problem becomes even more troubling when we look more closely at what is really at stake here. If Martha Nussbaum is even somewhat correct when it comes to the impact narrative can have on us, if the scientific literature is even partially right about the effects of narrative transport, and if the results of my own studies are at all tracking a real-world phenomenon, then stories not only have the power to persuade us with regard to perhaps benign preferences for one cereal or soda brand over another, they have the ability to sway our very moral character. Although there are numerous ways we might define or evaluate moral character, we should be able to agree that it must in some way rely on our beliefs, attitudes, intentions, emotions, and/or behavior, and it is on these very elements that narrative transport can have an impact.

And therein lies the main reason why we must be careful in deploying narrative transport as a persuasive strategy: from a philosophical perspective, marketing already

comes with its own myriad of problems, but the marketing of morality should make us tread even more lightly. It is crucial that we spend some time analyzing the potential moral problems associated with using narrative transport and determine under what conditions, if any, it is morally acceptable. To do this, I will explore what I see as the five broad categories of potential moral problems associated with the use of narrative transport and then offer some guidance on how to ethically deploy narrative to avoid these issues. But first, let's begin with a note about a related field of study that inspired this ethical investigation.

Nudge Theory – An Illustrative Aside

Although narrative transport has been widely studied, very little has been written about the ethics of using narrative transport to sway the mental states of others.[188] However, nudge theory is a concept that deals with shockingly similar issues to narrative transport and has found itself the focus of much controversy surrounding the ethics of its use. As such, I find it helpful to take a brief look at nudge theory and

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[188] A possible reason for this is that the majority of researchers at the forefront of studying narrative transport are not philosophers but trained psychologists or are coming at it from the standpoint of literary studies or even marketing. What little work on the ethics of narrative transport that has been done is generally on very specific, applied cases rather than a general investigation. For an example of this, see van Laer, Feiereisen, and Visconti's 2016 paper on narrative transportation and business ethics.

explore the various ethical issues that might carry over into the world of narrative transport.

The term "nudge" has been a hot topic in behavioral economics for the past 12 years and anyone who is a fan of podcasts on the topic like *Freakonomics*, *This American Life*, or *Planet Money* has likely grown tired of hearing about it. The term itself was coined by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in their 2008 book titled *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* and refers to "any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives."[189] Despite the somewhat jargon-laden definition, the concept behind nudge theory is actually rather simple. Our decisions are influenced, often completely unconsciously, by a plethora of factors. Obviously, factors internal to our psychology play a large role in our decisions of what to do, like what we believe, how we feel, and what our goals might be, but we also take into account a wide variety of factors present in the external world around us. For instance, you might choose a particular restaurant for dinner because it happened to be in your field of view at that exact moment, and once inside the restaurant you might decide to go with French fries as a side dish because it was the default option and you didn't feel like going through the hassle of asking for a substitution. If another

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[189] Thaler, Richard H.,Sunstein, Cass R. Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, And Happiness. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Pg. 6.

restaurant had happened to be in your line of sight, or if a different option were

presented as the default, you may have made a different decision.

We are subtly, or sometimes not so subtly, influenced by many external factors

every day, and those factors play some role, sometimes small and sometimes large, in

influencing the decisions we make. The totality of these large and small external

influences that have been designed by others is what Sunstein and Thaler are referring

to when they use the term "choice architecture." In other words, if the choices we make

are influenced by external factors, then this leaves open the possibility that we may be

able to design those factors in such a way as to influence human choice in particular

directions. We can, in effect, become architects of choice by designing a choice

architecture that bends human decision making in desirable ways.

Of course, there may be a fine line between a nudge and a shove, which is why

Thaler and Sunstein emphasize the importance of designing the choice architecture such

that no option is truly forbidden or obligatory, lest we descend into "Bad Book"

territory. The goal in a nudge is to maintain the person's autonomy while still subtly

directing them in the desired direction. Placing your restaurant in the line of sight of

foot traffic might influence a person's decision to eat there, but it in no way forces

anyone to eat at your establishment. They *could* eat anywhere they like, the choice is

still up to them, but the fact that they can easily see your restaurant makes it more

likely they will make the (hopefully free) choice to eat at your restaurant as opposed to

any other.

In recent years, nudge theory has been employed by numerous companies, organizations, and even countries with the aim of adjusting the choice architecture to influence everything from customers' buying habits to yearly income tax compliance.[190] Many examples are rather innocent, like the early nudge example of the "urinal fly" used in the men's-rooms of the Amsterdam Airport. By merely placing a tiny image of a fly next to the drain in urinals, administrators at the airport were able to reduce spillage by 80%, which, I can only imagine, makes quite the difference to restroom cleanliness throughout a busy travel day.[191] Other examples, however, have arguably less benign consequences. Johnson and Goldstein analyzed the way European countries acquire organ donors and found that those countries that use an opt-in rather than an opt-out system had vastly higher percentages of citizens who are organ donors, ranging from only 4.25% in Denmark where citizens must opt-in to become a donor to 99.98% in Austria where citizens must opt-out if they don't want to be donors.[192] Whereas placing a fly on a urinal only impacts how messy a restroom floor might get, changing something like the way people become organ donors has profound real world effects, both in terms of the lives that can be saved as well as the potential moral character of the people making the decisions to opt-in or opt-out.

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[190] Antinyan, Armenak and Asatryan, Zareh, Nudging for Tax Compliance: A Meta-Analysis (November 15, 2019). ZEW - Centre for European Economic Research Discussion Paper No. 19-055.
[191] Thaler, Richard, and Cass Sunstein. "Easy Does It." *The New Republic*, 9 Apr. 2008.
[192] Johnson, E, Goldstein, D (2003) Do defaults save lives? Science 302(5649): 1338–9.

The moral dimensions become trickier when nudge techniques are utilized by federal or local governments. Tom Goodwin has argued that the usage of nudge undermines the ideals of empowerment, freedom, and fairness that governments, and the UK government in particular, should be striving for.[193] Similarly, Luc Bovens worries that a governmental reliance on nudge strategies might lead to a society that "creates a people who have become incapable of taking their lives in their own hands and to make autonomous changes in their agency [that] fit with their overall preference structure."[194] In effect, there are worries of further reaching implications than mere nudges to morally neutral behavior.

What makes the nudge literature relevant to our current investigation is the similarity found within the ethical concerns in nudge and those found in narrative transport. In fact, many, including Blumenthal-Barby and Burroughs, cite the use of narrative as a particular type of nudge.[195] As such, it makes sense to look towards the nudge literature for guidance into how to navigate the ethical concerns of narrative transport. Additionally, due to the governmental aspects of nudge theory, paired with the large amounts of press the subject has received, many philosophers have taken a hand at analyzing nudge theory, something yet to be done widely in the case of narrative transport.

[193] Goodwin T. Why We Should Reject 'Nudge'. Politics. 2012 May 4;32(2):85-92

[194] Till Grüne-Yanoff and S.O. Hansson (2008) Preference Change: Approaches from Philosophy, Economics and Psychology, Berlin and New York: Springer, Theory and Decision Library A, Chapter 10.

[195] Blumenthal-Barby, Jennifer & Burroughs, Hadley. (2012). Seeking Better Health Care Outcomes: The Ethics of Using the "Nudge". The American journal of bioethics: AJOB. 12. Pg. 4

There are a number of "techniques" employed by the advocates of nudge theory, each with its own pros and cons. However, when looked at as a whole, a number of common ethical concerns begin to emerge within the literature. The most common ethical concern is whether the use of nudges might cause more harm than good, particularly at the governmental level. For example, setting organ donation as the default, or perhaps more troubling, setting "do not resuscitate" as the default position on medical records, might result in violations of individuals' deeply held beliefs. Similarly, making HIV screenings or mammograms a default procedure, rather than an opt-in procedure, could result in earlier diagnosis of disease, but could also result in significant and possibly unnecessary psychological harm in the case of false positives. There are also general concerns that the information and or research being used to inform a particular nudge could be mistaken or out of date, thus resulting in nudging a population in a harmful direction.[196] This is without even discussing situations where unscrupulous advertisers might use nudge techniques to more easily sell things like cigarettes, alcohol, are vaping products. Regardless of what technique is used, the need for cost benefit analyses to limit harm is crucial.

Social justice concerns are also common within the nudge literature. There are real worries that the use of nudge might either provide undue advantage to certain

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[196] My thinking here is the constant shift in public understanding over what food is healthy and what is not. A common joke is that every month news outlets flip-flop on whether it is healthy to eat eggs. A nudge based on shaky information, say, to reorganize a supermarket to get customers to eat more of the current fad diet trend, might end up with large scale negative impacts.

privileged social classes or disproportionately harm those in already disadvantaged

groups. Bovens points out that minority groups may be less likely to share the values of

the majority that motivate nudges in particular directions and would thereby be unfairly

influenced by widespread, governmental nudge efforts.[197] The use of incentives as social

nudges might also disproportionately influence members of lower socioeconomic

groups, or perhaps, depending on the particular incentive, be unattainable by these

vulnerable groups, as was found by Schmidt et al. to be the case in incentive programs

in Germany.[198]

The last main category of issues found in the nudge literature surround what I

will call "freedom issues." These are worries either that the autonomy of those being

nudged is somehow being undermined, or that those instituting the nudge are

attempting to substitute their own judgements or values for those of the ones being

nudged. For instance, it is undeniable that, on average, health outcomes are better for

individuals who eat more fruits and vegetables. However, are we morally justified in

rearranging supermarkets such that people who would not otherwise purchase healthy

items are unconsciously pressured to buy more? Does this create a troubling disconnect

between a person's behavior and her beliefs, attitudes, and intentions? What are we to

make of a person who had no previous desire to purchase fruit but finds herself in a

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[197] Till Grüne-Yanoff and S.O. Hansson (2008) Preference Change: Approaches from Philosophy, Economics and Psychology, Berlin and New York: Springer, Theory and Decision Library A, Chapter 10. Pg 15

[198] Schmidt, H., Voigt, K., & Wikler, D.I. (2010). Carrots, sticks, and health care reform--problems with wellness incentives. *The New England journal of medicine, 362 2*, e3

supermarket queue with a bag of apples at least in part because of an unnoticed nudge

technique? Furthermore, is it morally acceptable to effectively make decisions on

another person's behalf? These questions litter the nudge theory literature and are

worth investigating with regard to narrative transport.

Although not all ethical issues discussed in the nudge literature are relevant to

narrative transport, and some issues unique to narrative transport are not found in

nudge, I find the general framework to be helpful in shaping my thinking on how we

might approach the ethics of transport. Using the prevailing wisdom found in the nudge

literature as a jump off point, I have identified five categories of potential ethical

problems associated with the use of narrative transport: manipulation, paternalism,

social justice, authenticity, and general harm. In what follows, I will go through each

category, explain how the use of narrative transport could potentially fall into it, and

recommend methods of combating these concerns.

Manipulation

By my lights, the most pressing potential ethical problem with the use of

narrative transport is whether the psychological changes brought about by experiencing

narrative are the result of manipulation. Although there may be justified, and thus

morally acceptable, forms of manipulation, I take manipulation, and manipulativeness in

general, to be unsavory and morally suspect actions and tendencies. In much the same

way that Nussbaum's capabilities approach can account for the feeling of tragic loss

when a capability must be sacrificed for the sake of some higher capability, so too can

the negative ethical valance of manipulation account for the feeling of regret

experienced when manipulation is justified in a particular circumstance. That a

manipulative action might be required in service of some countervailing considerations

does not, I take it, make us feel good about having to manipulate, but rather shows that

manipulation is, under normal circumstances, seen as something to be avoided. In short,

I do not take the fact that there may arguably be situations in which manipulation is

justified as being problematic for the proposition that manipulation is ethically

questionable.[199]

At first blush, I have to admit that the use of stories to sway a person's mental

states appears to be quite manipulative. We want someone to believe, feel, or do

something, we have them experience a narrative, and then they are more likely to

believe, feel, or do that thing than if we had simply tried to achieve that end through

rational argumentation. Although I do think this process is intuitively manipulative, it is

difficult to put my finger on exactly why that is.

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[199] I am intentionally not making a claim on whether manipulation might be a *pro tanto* vs *prima facie* wrong. As interesting as this debate is (and it IS interesting!), I don't see that it has a bearing on our current investigation.

A layman's first attempt at a definition of manipulation might be something like "getting someone to do what you want them to do, but in the wrong way." As a somewhat new stepfather, I can't help but think of the common types of manipulation we might see used by a child trying to get what she wants from her parents. Instead of accepting "no" as an answer to a request for a new toy, the child might throw a tantrum, cry uncontrollably, or, depending on the age of the child, start appealing to real or imagined social norms or even poke at insecurities to make you start questioning your ability as a parent.[200] Where the feelings of being manipulated come in, at least for me, is in the observation that these methods are turned on and off at will for the express purpose of getting me to do what the child wants. It is one thing when your child cries as a result of a genuine need, either biological or psychological, which prompts you to action, but quite another to realize, usually after the fact, that the emotional display was strategically deployed solely and intentionally to exploit those natural feelings of wanting to alleviate your kid's suffering, all for the goal of getting the newest video game. Even if you might have been willing to buy the item under other circumstances, the way the child went about getting what she wants just feels wrong.

That narratives are effective at changing an individual's beliefs, attitudes, emotions, intentions, and even behavior, in some instances more so than rational

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[200] As a side note, I find it fascinating that children, and teens in particular, become masters at using nudge techniques without even knowing it. For example, appealing to social norms is a well-researched nudge strategy ("85% of your neighbors pay their taxes on time") and children seem to gravitate towards this strategy almost instinctively ("all my friends have a new cell phone! I'll be the only one without one!").

argumentation, has hopefully been shown by this point. The question then becomes

whether narrative achieves this end in "the right way." In other words, is the process in

which narrative transport achieves its persuasive effects manipulative? To determine

this, we need a more fleshed-out definition of what manipulation is and why it is

morally wrong.

To work out a full definition of manipulation would be an entire dissertation-

length topic in itself and thus not feasible in this current discussion. Thankfully, I do not

believe a full, all-encompassing definition of manipulation is necessary for our purposes.

In all likelihood, a full definition of manipulation would need to be disjunctive, as there

are a wide variety of cases universally thought of as manipulative that do not easily fall

under one umbrella and are not entirely illustrative in determining the ethical status of

narrative transport. For instance, Joel Feinberg grounds manipulation in terms of

applied pressure, either physical, psychological, or emotional.[201] I want you to do or

believe something, you are not previously inclined to do or believe that thing, so I apply

some sort of pressure to make you, or make it more likely that you, will do or believe

the thing I want. Clearly, there are cases in which applying pressure of this sort is

manipulative, but is that what is going on in narrative transport? Am I applying pressure

to someone by telling them or showing them a narrative? Perhaps, fittingly, in a

metaphorical sense, but not in the true felt sense that Feinberg is referring to. There is

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[201] Feinberg, Joel, 1989, Harm to Self, (The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law Volume 3), New York: Oxford University Press.

no felt pressure to change one's mind during narrative transport, not even a sense that one should change her views in the face of some real or imagined consequence. Rather, those who change their minds as a result of narrative transport seemingly just "find" themselves with their new views. In fact, the more people report feeling the persuasive pressure of a narrative the less they are actually transported.[202] If anything, pressure seems to inhibit narrative transport itself.[203]

This might lead us to believe that manipulation must have something to do with the bypassing of reason or our deliberative capacities. Along these lines, Joseph Raz has argued that manipulation "perverts the way that [a] person reaches decisions, forms preference, or adopts goals."[204] This, I think, gets closer to what might be problematic with narrative transport, but also doesn't quite get it right. What Raz has in mind here are cases in which the manipulator knows that the intended target would not rationally decide to do what the manipulator wants and so bypasses those rational capacities entirely to achieve the desired result, much like the child who wants the toy they have previously been denied. Although this arguably occurs in some instances of narrative transport (think, perhaps, tobacco ads that use narrative to make smoking look "cool"), I don't believe it quite captures the entirety of the potential problem. After all, a

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[202] Slater, Michael D., and Donna Rouner, "Entertainment- Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion," *Communication Theory*, 2002, 183-84
[203] There may be a fine line here between manipulation and coercion. Many define manipulation broadly as persuasion that is not rational and also not coercive, but Feinberg is more accepting of coercion being a species of manipulation. Again, interesting to note, but not relevant to our investigation.
[204] Raz, Joseph, 1988, The Morality of Freedom, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. Pg. 377

narrative might actively engage a person's deliberative faculties, maybe even enhancing

them by making salient considerations that went by previously unnoticed, and still be

manipulative. Furthermore, this approach assumes a rather narrow definition of what

permissible instances of persuasion look like. Personally, I would rather not hold rational

deliberation as the end-all-be-all of human cognition, leaving open the possibility for

things other than cold, hard reason to be acceptable methods of changing one's

mind.[205]

That being said, there still seems to be something potentially off about the way

narrative transport sways our mental states. In my mind, the theory that best captures

this feeling of unease is that manipulation is a form of "trickery." Specifically, it's an

attempt to "trick" a person by influencing their mental states, and even behavior, such

that the manipulated mental state or behavior is faulty in some way. As Robert Noggle

puts it, "there are certain norms or ideals that govern beliefs, desires, and emotions . . .

Manipulative action is the attempt to get some one's beliefs, desires, or emotions to

violate these norms and fall short of these ideals."[206] Noggle uses the metaphor of

manipulating the levers on a machine to illustrate his point. When someone engages in

manipulation, it is almost as if the manipulator views her target not as a human but as a

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[205] This may be neither here nor there, but I have always taken issue with the way some people think that any decision come to by way of anything other than flawless reasoning operated on objective facts is somehow inferior or otherwise a sign of weakness. For instance, what is so wrong about taking emotion into account when making a decision? I think it is precisely this sort of "Gradgrind" type thinking that Nussbaum is trying to avoid with the literary imagination.
[206] Noggle, Robert, 1996, "Manipulative Actions: A Conceptual and Moral Analysis", American Philosophical Quarterly, 33(1): 43–55.

machine with levers, knobs, and settings that can be altered and adjusted to create the beliefs, desires, and emotions the manipulator wants. Although viewing another as less-than-human might be problematic for independent reasons, it is specifically the intentional creation of non-ideal mental states that make an action manipulative. Any belief, desire, or emotion created as a result of these manipulated levers and knobs would fall short of the norms and ideals we normally associate with them.

It is in this way, I believe, that Noggle best captures the worry of manipulation surrounding narrative transport. Noggle's view does not rely on a single dimension like pressure, the bypassing of rational deliberation, or any other singular element to define manipulation. Instead, it analyzes the manipulated element, be it a belief, emotion, or otherwise, and determines whether that element, and its creation, adheres to the norms and ideals we generally associate with it. In other words, this view defines manipulation by looking at the potentially manipulated element and asking, "does this element adhere to accepted norms and was it arrived at in what we might call 'the right way'?". It makes no specific claim about what method or mechanism manipulation must use, but rather looks at the nature and causal history of the potentially manipulated element, as well as the intent of the manipulator to create these elements that fall short of their ideals.

There are many ways in which a belief, desire, or emotion might fall short of its norms or ideals. For example, since G.E.M Anscombe's seminal book *Intention*,

philosophers have considered truth to be a success condition of belief.[207] In other

words, it's ideal that our beliefs are true and based on true information. Someone who

intentionally tries to get someone to believe something that is false would therefore be

guilty of manipulation in virtue of trying to undermine a norm of belief. Similarly, a

manipulator might intentionally try to make irrelevant factors salient, overemphasize

the importance of lesser considerations, or play on insecurities or fears to get the target

to weigh some consideration more heavily than she otherwise may. In each of these

cases, Noggle argues that a norm or ideal of belief is being "toyed with" or outright

violated, often simply just the ideal of "attending to all and only true and relevant"

considerations.[208]

Perhaps Noggle's best and most clear example of how manipulation violates

norms and ideals can be found in the manipulation of desires. According to Noggle, "a

norm or ideal for desires is that they be subjectively rational, that they conform to one's

beliefs about what there is most reason to do."[209] The heart of this norm is that there

should be a tight connection or match between a person's desires, beliefs, and the

reasons they have for action.[210] This is to say that something has gone wrong when a

person's desires do not match the reasons they have or even the beliefs they hold. For

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[207] G. E. M. Anscombe, Intention, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[208] Noggle, Robert, 1996, "Manipulative Actions: A Conceptual and Moral Analysis", American Philosophical Quarterly, 33(1): 43–55.
[209] Ibid. Pg. 45
[210] A lot might hinge here on what a reason is and how someone comes to actually have a reason. This may be necessary for putting a finer point on a theory of manipulation but is not necessary for my general project here.

example, on this view, an advertisement that instills the desire to smoke in a person who knows smoking is bad for her health and believes that smoking is unhealthy and therefore not something she should do has been manipulated in virtue of the mismatch between the manipulated desire and the host of psychological elements that would, under normal circumstances, lead that person to decide by her own lights not to smoke. The normal causal story, so to speak, of how we form, or ideally should form, our beliefs and desires has been intentionally meddled with by an outside source, and therein lies the manipulation.

Although the ideals and norms of emotions are arguably more complex, a similar argument can be made for them. For instance, one norm or ideal for emotions might be that they "make salient whatever is most important, most relevant to the situation at hand."[211] In light of this, a manipulator might act in such a way as to alter our emotions to draw our attention away from relevant considerations and towards something that leads us to draw unideal conclusions. Returning to the example of children, a child may throw a tantrum that makes his stepfather give improper weight to the child's desire for the new toy, thus altering his stepfather's deliberation. Again, we find that manipulation, in some way or another, alters the normal or ideal flow of psychological life and makes it "go wrong" in some fashion.

One interesting feature of Noggle's definition of manipulation is that it allows for the morally permissible altering of a person's psychological levers and settings. For an

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[211] Ibid. Pg. 46

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action to be labeled as manipulative it must move these levers away from their ideal or

normal settings, but it leaves open the possibility that someone might attempt to move

them *towards* their ideal settings as well. The clearest example of this is therapy, in

which a therapist tries to adjust a person's psychological levers back to or towards their

ideal settings, ensuring that the psychological processes and links between

psychological elements return to their ideal states. Whereas views that define

manipulation through the bypassing of rational deliberation or even pressure might

have difficulty accounting for the permissibility of things like psychological therapy,

Noggle's view easily accommodates it by appealing to the proper functioning of our

psychological lives. Intentionally meddling with our psychology such that it goes wrong

is manipulation, whereas intentionally meddling with our psychology to make it go right

is not.[212]

 With this definition of manipulation in place, we can now properly evaluate

whether changing someone through narrative transport is manipulation. The central

question we are faced with is: Does narrative transport move a person's psychological

levers away from their normal or ideal settings? The answer, I believe, must be: Yes, it

very often is, but not always. Take our cartoony thought experiment as a first example.

Bad Book clearly alters our levers away from their ideals, as there is virtually no

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[212] Noggle relativizes "ideal functioning" to what the influencer thinks. Thus, a person is still guilty of manipulation in cases where she believes she is leading her target astray but in reality, she is not. In this way, manipulation is like lying. Although this admittedly leads to some odd situations (is a cult leader really not manipulative if he genuinely believes he is a god and that it is in everyone's best interest to worship him?), it merely moves the impermissibility of the action elsewhere.

connection, let alone an ideal one, between the new mental states and the rest of the

person's psychology. Nor is there a causal story that adheres to the norms of any

psychological element I am aware of. Bad Book is therefore clearly a form of

manipulation. So, too, would be the many forms of narrative used in advertisements

that aim to generate desires based on irrelevant, false, or otherwise dubious

information embedded within the story. If the goal of a storyteller is to create false

beliefs or desires, attitudes, or intentions based on false or irrelevant information, then

that story qualifies as manipulative under this definition.

It is worth asking who's (or what's) goal or intention we are specifically worried

about here. Can a story itself have a goal or intent? Are we only concerned with the

intent of the original story creator? What about someone who is simply sharing the

story but didn't create it?[213] The answers to these questions depend on the particulars

of a given situation. For any instance of a person experiencing a narrative and having

their mental states altered, we must ask whether anyone facilitated that experience

with the express purpose of creating those mental states in a "non-ideal way," then that

would be an instance of manipulation. By "facilitated," I mean any part of the causal

process of the manipulated person coming to experience that narrative, be it the story

creation, dissemination, or otherwise. As to whether stories themselves can have intent,

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[213] My thanks to Eric Schwitzgebel for raising these questions.

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I will leave that question largely unanswered. For my purposes, it is sufficient to track the intent of a story back to either the one who created it or the one who shared it.[214]

But now it begins to look like all changes brought about by narrative transport might be instances of manipulation. As I've shown, narrative transport makes us less likely to engage critically with the information provided, effectively disengaging our deliberative faculties for the duration of our narrative journey. Given this fact, in what way are the changes we experience through narrative transport the result of ideal functioning of our psychological processes? How do our changed beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and intentions adhere to their respective ideals if they came about in this unorthodox way?

These questions, I must admit, are difficult to answer. But I believe I can offer some guidance in navigating these murky ethical waters when it comes to narrative transport. In order to avoid the charge of manipulation, a narrative must work a person's "internal levers" in such a way that it enhances their functioning or otherwise aims that person towards being able to create or posses mental states that adhere to their respective norms and ideals. Take the Story Time with Chris example I shared at the beginning of this chapter. My aim in telling that story to students was not to brainwash them into believing one particular philosophical theory over another, or to

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[214] For instance, it might be the case that a person creates a story with the express intention of manipulating others, say, by spreading false information. However, one might also take a story created with no such intent and share it to another with the express purpose of creating non-ideal mental states. The former is an example of manipulation on the part of the story creator and the latter is an example of manipulation on the part of the story disseminator.

trick them into a faulty way of thinking. Rather, it was an attempt to inspire them to

think about the world in a different way, to highlight certain elements of human

behavior as salient for the ensuing discussion, to stoke their emotions and lead them to

care about a topic that they might not have otherwise cared about. In these ways, the

goal of my story was to move my students' psychological levers and adjust their setting

to a more optimal position, helping them think about the topic at hand in a clearer way,

to remove psychological obfuscation by way of providing new and novel perspectives. In

short, the goal of my story was to provide information through an experience that

would hopefully help them think more clearly and more easily come to their own

conclusions.

However, we have to concede that most narratives do not have this goal. In fact,

in light of this definition, the very narrative used in my own studies detailed in chapter

three may be manipulative. One could argue, as I did above with Story Time with Chris,

that Mamtha's story as presented in my studies was intended to provide participants

with a new perspective that gives them information with which they can better

deliberate, and thus it enhances their "psychological levers." Or, one could also argue

that the story is no better than the one told by the tobacco companies and that it alters

emotions and draws attention to irrelevant details that skew a person's beliefs and

desires away from their ideals and norms. Perhaps it depends on the person who is

receiving the narrative. Defining manipulation in this way might make the discovery of

manipulative stories difficult without further research into the mechanisms of narrative

transport or at least some way of better understanding why people change their minds after being transported into a narrative world.

But one thing I can say is that Noggle's definition of manipulation lines up with Nussbaum's excitement over the literary imagination. For Nussbaum, novels are ways of enhancing the psychological lives of their readers by providing new perspectives and stimulating empathy for our fellow humans. So long as narratives strive for the enhancement of autonomy and a properly functioning psychological life, and avoid the temptation of expediency, of simply shifting belief's, attitudes, emotions, and intentions without regard for the rest of the person's psychological elements, then they will go far in avoiding the charge of manipulation.

Paternalism

In my mind, issues revolving around paternalism are the second most pressing ethical concern with using narrative transport to sway a person's mental states. This is due to the fact that paternalism and manipulation are closely linked. In fact, one might argue that paternalism is actually a species of manipulation that occurs when manipulation is justified by appealing to the manipulated person's own good. Thought of in this way, paternalism becomes more likely as we try to avoid the charges of manipulation, at least as I have laid them out in the previous section. One way I argue we can avoid manipulation while using narrative transport is to ensure that the effects

of transportation are always geared towards enhancing the "psychological levers" of the one experiencing the narrative. One natural way of reading this is that narrative transport should only be used for the betterment of those being transported. Of course, such ways of thinking, that something is being done for a person's own good, can easily be used as justification for overriding or disregarding the actual interests or desires of the person in question, and when this happens we are firmly within the realm of paternalism. Although paternalism normally falls under the umbrella of manipulation, it is such a widespread phenomenon that it is worth discussing in length on its own.[215]

I see the nudge literature as a herald of things to come with regard to this issue. Because many governments have taken to nudge theory as an acceptable way of influencing the behavior of their citizens, cries of creeping paternalism have been levied by those concerned about government overreach. This has triggered general discussions about the paternalistic nature of nudge techniques, whether used by government bodies or not. What right does the supermarket, for example, have to try and influence my buying habits? Similar issues, I believe, revolve around narrative transport, and the use of transport to change psychological elements in particular directions, whether used by governments or private parties, raises the same ethical concerns.

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[215] Although not all paternalistic actions are instances of manipulation (the enforcement of seatbelt laws are paternalistic but not necessarily manipulative in any obvious way), all instances of paternalism that utilize narrative transport are likely manipulative in virtue of the mechanisms at work. This will hopefully become more clear below. Regardless, it is not necessary for the current discussion to make a definitive stance on exactly which instances of narrative are manipulative and which are paternalistic, as these are not meant to be mutually exclusive categories and overlap will likely exist.

But first, let us spend some time defining paternalism itself. The word "paternalism" comes from the Greek word for father, "πατήρ" (patér), and at its linguistic core means to treat someone as a father would treat his child. Naturally, we restrict and limit the behavior of our children and we do so for their own good or sometimes for the good of others. For instance, we don't allow our children to put their hands on hot plates because it would be bad for them if they did, and we don't allow our children to physically harm other children because it would be bad for others.[216] Of course, this sort of behavior no one has a problem with. The issue arises when we extend this parent-style approach to other adults. We tend to think, particularly in the West, that autonomy and freedom are things to be championed and that adults have the right, to an extent, to determine for themselves what values and ideals they want to live by. Any action that undermines or substitutes a person's autonomy is, therefore, *prima facie* ethically problematic.

The prevailing definition of paternalism, proffered by Gerald Dworkin, holds that something is paternalistic if the following conditions obtain:[217]

1. It interferes with the liberty or autonomy of the person.

2. It is done without the consent of the person.

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[216] It is also, in a sense, bad for the child herself to hit others, as she will then develop negative habits and social skills. Of course, one could easily argue that these habits and social skills are only bad *because* they are bad for others, but this is something I would rather not get into here.

[217] Dworkin, Gerald, "Defining Paternalism", in Coons and Weber 2013: 25–39.

3. It is done to improve the welfare or in someway promote the interests, values, or good of the person.

It is easy to see how instances of parenting easily satisfy these conditions. We prevent our children from doing any number of things (condition 1), regardless of whether they want us to or not (condition 2), for their own good, be it physical, psychological, social, or otherwise (condition 3). Within the realm of adults, the easiest examples are generally found in the arena of law exercised by federal or local governments. Take seatbelt regulations, for instance.[218] In the United States, the government requires that all passengers wear seatbelts while in moving vehicles, which is an interference on a person's liberty. Although there could be reasonable disagreement over what qualifies as consent in the legal sense, it is undeniably true that these laws are enforced against the wishes of some citizens. Finally, these laws, at least ostensibly, are enforced to promote the welfare of citizens themselves. The enforcement of many laws follows this same format and are prime examples of paternalism in action.

Of the three conditions above, condition 3 is the most straight forward and widely accepted. Paternalism involves doing something for someone's own good, that much is clear. Conditions one and two, even in the paradigmatic examples given above,

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[218] Seatbelt laws are both federal and state affairs in the United States. There are general federal regulations about the type and number of seatbelts that must be present in all automobiles, while individual states impose further restrictions and requirements.

become slightly more tricky and up for interpretation. What, for instance, qualifies as an interference of the liberty or autonomy of another? Certainly, people who do not agree with seatbelt laws can, and do, choose not to abide by the law. They simply then run the risk of being pulled over and issued a ticket by law enforcement. Even someone being held at gunpoint by a captor has the option of disobeying the captors orders, as inadvisable as that may be. So, what qualifies as an interference may be an open question. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to read this condition as being a general guiding framework to help us analyze situations on a case by case basis. So long as we stick to the spirit of the condition, that paternalism involves, as I see it, "messing with" someone's ability to live by their own lights, then we should stay on the right path.

Similarly, condition two might include cases of overtly overriding someone's dissent, as would be the case when police enforce laws broken by those performing civil disobedience, but it need not include actions as dramatic as this. Generally, cases of potential paternalism will involve no consent or dissent at all. The targets of paternalistic acts might not even know that their liberty or autonomy are being interfered with in the first place. Again, this condition is up to interpretation, but the spirit of the condition is that paternalism involves doing this either against or regardless of a person's wishes.

Even though the final condition is more straightforward, it is worth noting again that paternalistic acts might be performed on a particular person not necessarily for

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that person's own good, but for the good of others. This would possibly be the case, for example, with certain justifications for incarceration or the death penalty, at one extreme, and the raising of children in particular ways, at the other. Both of these could arguably involve limiting the liberty or an individual for the sole benefit of others. Although some may argue, as Dworkin does, that paternalism only involves actions that are justified by appealing to the benefit of the person being interfered with, I would like to leave open the possibility that paternalism could apply in these "greater good" style cases as well.

With the workings of a definition in place, we should now ask, Is the use of narrative transport a form of paternalism? Again, there are certain cases for which the answer is unarguably "yes." Situations in which someone used Bad Book to change someone's mind for their own benefit would clearly be instances of paternalism, but I don't think we need to go all the way to fantasy to find cases of narrative transport being used paternalistically.

One particularly fascinating case study is Miguel Sabido's use of telenovelas to intentionally influence public opinion and behavior in Mexico.[219] Between 1975 and 1982, Sabido created and aired seven one-year-long telenovelas that each focused on a particular social issue seen as desirable within Mexican culture. These social issues included adult literacy, gender equality, and child development. According to Arvind

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[219] Singhal, A., & Rogers E. M. (1999). "Entertainment-education: A communication strategy for social change." Yahweh, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Singhal, the airing of each season correlated with large increases in enrollments in the related government services like adult literacy programs.[220] Amazingly, family planning centers in Mexico saw an increase of 500,000 couples visiting in the period of time following the airing of *Acompáñame*, a telenovela specifically dealing with family planning issues.[221] Across a number of topics and a number of measures, Sabido's telenovelas appear to have been quite successful in instilling some degree of social change.

What makes this even more interesting for our current discussion is that Sabido emphasized the need for strong narrative elements when constructing his socially minded telenovelas. In an interview with Singhal, Sabido argues that in order to make a television show that has real world influence, you must ensure that the narrative at its core is strong. In fact, Sabido sites Aristotle's poetics as his biggest influence and took cues from Jungian psychology to make identifiable archetypal characters.[222] As far as I can tell, Sabido may have been the most effective person to utilize network television for the express purpose of instilling social change across an entire country.

But the ethical implications of such a project are hard to ignore. According to our definition, Sabido's telenovelas come dangerously close to instances of paternalism. Conditions two and three are fairly clearly met, as the telenovelas are very much

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[220] Singhal, A., Rogers, E. M., & Brown, W. J. (1993). Harnessing the potential of entertainment-education telenovelas. Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands), 51(1), 1–18.
[221] Ibid. Pg. 6
[222] Singhal, Arvind & Obregon, Rafael. (1999). Social uses of commercial soap operas: a conversation with Miguel Sabido. The Journal of development communication. 10. 68-77.

intended to improve the welfare of those who watch them and most of the viewers, I have to imagine, were unaware of their persuasive intention. At the very least, we can be sure that the network did not obtain consent from each viewer or flash a warning over the screen before each episode aired.

Which leaves us with the first, and most difficult, condition for paternalism. Did these telenovelas, in any way, interfere with the viewers' liberty or autonomy? Although I fear I am unable to give a full and satisfactory answer to this question here, I do think returning to the spirit of the first condition mentioned above is helpful. The real question, as I see it, is do narratives of these sorts negatively impact a person's ability to live by her own lights, to make decisions for herself that truly represent her own values and not just those of the narrative creator? That, I believe, is what lies at the core of the concern here.

To help answer this, I turn to Miguel Sabido himself. When asked "What do you say to those who ask you: 'Who are you to determine what is right or wrong for others?'", Sabido responded with the following:

My answer is simple. I do not decide. The messages are based on, and consistent with, the nation's constitution, and the UN documents to which a country is a signatory. My programmes are only a bridge. Our nation's constitution says, for

instance, that all citizens are equal. If such is the case, can one take issue with

promoting gender equality?[223]

Sabido's answer, that his telenovelas are merely bridges, is illuminative. I take his meaning to be that he is not making decisions on anyone's behalf, that those who experience his narratives retain the ability to make decisions for themselves. Instead, he offers assistance in moving his viewers from their starting place to a new psychological location, much like a bridge might assist someone in crossing a deep crevasse. Just like the real-world bridge, no one is forced to take it, and only those who desire to cross it will find themselves in the new location. Thought of in this way, narrative transport is merely an optional tool, something that augments a person's ability to overcome obstacles that keep them from arriving at psychological endpoints that may be cut off from them without the narrative assistance. On this view, narrative transport does not interfere with liberty and autonomy, it enhances it, opening up new options and opportunities through the bridging of mental gaps, allowing us to reach new conclusions once cut off to us.[224]

This is actually reminiscent of a similar defense found within the nudge theory literature. The founders of nudge theory, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, coined the

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[223] Ibid. Pg. 75

[224] I am intentionally setting aside the question of what these "mental obstacles" might be, as that would be a dissertation in and of itself. However, see Nussbaum's thoughts on the benefits of narrative transport in chapter one for a possible explanation of what psychological skills we might gain through narrative transport and how those skills could open up new possibilities for us.

phrase "libertarian paternalism" to capture the spirit of this defense against charges of paternalism. Although it sounds like an oxymoron, libertarian paternalism is the idea that we can influence an individual's behavior while ensuring that no choices or options are blocked off, inevitably leaving the decision up to the individual.[225] In fact, libertarian paternalism is based, in part, on the theory that human's are actually bad at making decisions, particularly ones that align with their own interests. As such, libertarian paternalism argues that things like nudges, or narrative transport, might actually aid agents in making better decisions while still allowing that agent to make decisions for herself.

Another principle of libertarian paternalism worth noting is that some level of paternalism, or at least influence, is inevitable. With regard to grocery stores, *something* has to be placed near the entrance or at eyelevel on the shelves, and so, by necessity, something will be given a nudge in terms of increased sales. We may as well, the thinking goes, give a nudge to those things that might benefit customers more, given we necessarily have to nudge something. Similarly, one might say that information has to be presented in some way, so why not use the form of presentation that has the best chance of augmenting decision making. If you believe that narrative does in fact offer a bridge, as Sabido does, then this is a persuasive thought.

But as impressive and encouraging as I find the results from Sabido's telenovelas, I can't help but think of how easily these sorts of efforts might slide into manipulation

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[225] Cass Sunstein & Richard Thaler, Libertarian Paternalism, 93 Am. Econ. Rev. 175 (2003).

justified through paternalism. To more easily see this, let's imagine a similar but slightly altered scenario. Suppose instead of being motivated to further a cause we might agree with that Sabido was motivated by deeply held anti-abortion beliefs. We could even imagine that he believed these beliefs were somehow supported by certain sections of Mexico's constitution. As a result, he creates a telenovela in which two beloved characters become pregnant, one deciding to have an abortion while the other decides to carry the pregnancy to term. The plot of the telenovela then plays out such that the character who had the abortion befalls a series of tragic outcomes, all tied back to her decision to abort her pregnancy, while the character who gave birth finds redemption in her child and goes on to live a thriving, flourishing life. The character who had the abortion deeply regrets her decision, while the character who did not have the abortion attributes all her success to that one decision.

Now, imagine that through watching this show thousands of viewers come to believe that these outcomes are representative of the general population, that people who have abortions all regret their decisions and face terrible hardships as a result, while those who decide to carry their pregnancies to term feel perfectly fine about their decision and things always go far better than they would have otherwise. Undoubtably, these scenarios occur, but they are not representative of all women's experiences. As such, Sabido would be attempting to create beliefs that fall short of their ideals in that they do not properly reflect reality, and this would be done, from the perspective of

Sabido, for the viewers' own good. This, I believe, would be a clear example of using

narrative in both a manipulative and paternalistic way.

Unfortunately, I don't believe the research on narrative and decision making are

adequate to fully answer these concerns. That being said, I believe we have enough to

offer a modest response to charges of paternalism in the case of narrative transport.

Much like with worries of manipulation, intent means quite a bit here. Narratives aimed

solely at swaying a person's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior without regard

to that person's deliberative processes at all run dangerously close to ethically

unacceptable paternalism. However, narratives that aim to enhance a person's decision-

making capabilities, perhaps by offering new perspectives, be those psychological,

practical, or emotional, run closer to Sabido's original ideal of offering a bridge rather

than administering a prod. Augmentation of agency, as opposed to its obfuscation,

should always be the goal.

Admittedly, this is highly subjective and potentially impossible to determine for

sure. Such is the nature of moral life. This does, however, provide an ideal to aim for

that might inform practical changes in the presentation of narratives meant to transport

and change people. Sabido famously included epilogues at the end of his episodes that

explicitly laid out the moral messages found within the programming, usually delivered

by a known and trusted public figure. Techniques like this lay bare Sabido's intentions,

that he is not trying to deceive or pull the wool over anyone's eyes, so to speak. It

creates an air of transparency to the endeavor and makes credible Sabido's claim that

he is trying to offer a bridge that aides the decision making of his viewers. With the right

motivation, I have no doubt that further techniques could be found that to make sure

narrative transport remains a bridge and not a paternalistic tool.

Social Justice

Although manipulation and paternalism are the two biggest concerns with the

use of narrative transport, there are other potential ethical problems surrounding the

use of narrative transport that warrant brief discussion. One such problem is a host of

potential ethical problems I collect under the unified heading "social justice issue." For

our purposes, I define "social justice" as the fair distribution of social advantages and

disadvantages. There are innumerable factors that impact a person's ability to flourish in

a civil society, and it is in our best interest to ensure that, to the best of our abilities,

society is not structured in such a way as to either unfairly advantage or unfairly

disadvantage particular groups through the distribution of these factors. The way I look

at it, life is hard enough as it is, we should do our best to ensure that life isn't any

harder, or unfairly, systemically easier, for any particular group than it needs to be.

Social justice issues are so prevalent and prolific that a thorough rundown of

examples is as impossible here as it is unnecessary. Seeing as how this is a project on

narrative, however, it seems fitting to discuss one example from cinema to frame our

discussion. The 1997 science fiction film Gattaca, directed by Andrew Niccol, depicts a

future in which the genetic engineering of children has given rise to two classes of

people, those "perfect" individuals who are the result of genetic tinkering, and

"invalids" who were born the old fashioned way with no alteration whatsoever.[226]

Without proof of your genetic superiority, all the best jobs and resources of society are

cut off, essentially making those born without genetic manipulation lead tremendously

disadvantaged lives. This is a prime example of a situation where something, in this case

genetic manipulation, has led to an unfair distribution of a social advantage. Undeniably,

genetically engineering children, at least in the world of Gattaca, provides advantages

that make it appealing. Who wouldn't want to protect their yet unborn children from

disease or even less than ideal eyesight? But such practices led to a world in which this

tremendously important advantage is only available to the very wealthy, and therein

lies, at least one, social justice problem.

In essence, we want to avoid situations in which the rich get richer or the poor

get poorer, metaphorically, or literally, speaking. Of course, it is likely impossible to

eliminate all sources of inequality, nor would it be, in my opinion, advisable to strive for

equality of outcome for all people, but I do believe that we should do all we can to

structure the world such that social advantages and disadvantages are distributed as

equally as possible. With that in mind, is it possible that using narrative transport as a

persuasive tool could result in social justice issues?

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[226] Fun fact not everyone knows about Gattaca: the title of the film is actually made from the letters GATC, which are the nucleobases of DNA.

Although I think this is a lesser worry than those discussed above regarding manipulation and paternalism, the possibility of using narrative transport in ways that give rise to social justice issues is real enough to warrant serious consideration. At the outset, it's worth noting that this is primarily a concern with regard to the widespread use of narrative as a persuasive tool by governments and large corporations. No one is probably worried about social inequalities being created by individuals using narrative to convince their friends of one thing or another. However, the use of narrative on smaller-than-nation-wide scales might also be problematic. For instance, could the use of narrative as a teaching tool, as I demonstrated in Story Time with Chris, be problematic from a social justice standpoint?

Quite possibly. Recall that in chapter two I broke down the moderators of narrative transport into two broad categories: receiver-based moderators and story-based moderators. To start, it could be the case that an unequal distribution of receiver-based moderators within a population could result in unequal levels of narrative transport being experienced by the individuals within that population. If there is a social advantage or disadvantage found within the effects of that narrative transport, then we find ourselves in a position where certain groups might be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by their exposure to a highly transporting narrative.

Let's stick with Story Time with Chris as our primary example. Suppose I taught exclusively through the use of narratives like the one I relayed at the beginning of this chapter, weaving all of my lessons through the lens of personal narratives. Knowing

what we now know about the receiver-based moderators of narrative transport, there

are a number of factors that could make this practice potentially problematic. For

example, general transportability and prior knowledge are both strong moderators that

increase levels of transportation. Given that not all students will have similar levels of

general transportability, nor will they have similar levels of prior knowledge or even

interest in the content of the narratives, they are likely to experience differing levels of

narrative transport and thus receive differing levels of the results of that transport.

Along these same lines, attention, concentration, and distractibility were found to be

strong moderators of transport, which means those who pay less attention, either

willingly or as a result of an attention deficit disorder, will also not experience as much

transport.

This is potentially troubling for a number of reasons. First, students with lower

transportability through no fault of their own, either through something like an

attention deficit disorder or just the genetic lottery, are unable to experience the effects

of narrative transport to the same degree as highly transportable students.[227] Similarly,

those students with more of a background in a particular field might be able to

experience more transport, and thus reap more of the effects. [228] This would result in a

potentially unfair distribution of advantages or disadvantages among students.

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[227] It's worth noting that this could be seen as either an unfair advantage or an unfair disadvantage,
depending on how you view the effects of narrative transport.
[228] It is very arguable that this is the case with courses anyway, that students with more of a
background are able to get more out of it, but somehow it feels different with narrative transport.
Perhaps it is that transport is not a widely accepted method for engaging with course material, or
perhaps I am just off in my evaluation that it is different. I leave that to you to decide.

Naturally, we would like it to be the case that all students begin on a level playing field

and that something like their inherent transportability, that may be a factor of some

unknown genetic component, does not impact what they get out of a class.[229] Although

I argued against their existence in chapter 2, further research might find there to be

actual gender differences with regard to transportability, and if so, these would also

warrant closer examination.

Moving away from the classroom, these issues become even more worrisome at

the national level. The widespread use of narrative by governments or corporations

could potentially result in unfair advantages experienced by those capable of higher

levels of transportation, or even unfair disadvantages and burdens by those more

susceptible to independently unethical uses of narrative transport. On the negative side,

it is already undeniably the case that advertisers and marketing firms utilize narrative

transport to adjust beliefs, attitudes, and purchasing habits of potential customers.

Certain populations could thus be more susceptible to these effects than others. On the

positive side, any attempt by, say, a government to use narrative in a beneficial way

could inadvertently result in already vulnerable populations being left out of the

benefits. As mentioned above, those with lower transportability due to disorders may

miss out on the benefits of such a campaign, and since higher levels of education result

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[229] One might think that something like IQ is also an inherent trait that impacts how much a student might get out of a class, and that would be true. IQ and transportability are both, perhaps, inherent traits. However, whereas it may be difficult to accommodate wide varieties of IQ in certain classes, we may be able to accommodate wide levels of transportability.

in higher levels of transportation, those in lower educated socioeconomic groups could potentially also be left out.

Although I don't see story-based moderators as being as problematic as receiver-based moderators, they are still worth keeping an eye on. Because higher quality stories result in higher levels of transportability, there is the possibility that those willing to spend the most money on hiring the best story creators will have the most persuasive power. This is, in all likely hood, already the case in the marketing world, but it is at least one potential social justice issue worth flagging.

There is also the concern that narrative could be used to influence mental states in a direction that reflects the majority's position and goes against the wishes and values of minority groups. Here I am thinking of situations in which a government might want to assimilate or indoctrinate minority groups or immigrants into having mentalities or values that more closely resemble those seen as properly reflecting the values of that country. Whereas some level of mental assimilation into a country is likely a good thing, the desire to illuminate anything viewed as a foreign way of thinking or as unrepresentative of that country is, I believe, harmful and unethical. *Birth of a Nation* once again strikes me as a perfect example of this, but any obviously racist or otherwise bigoted narrative runs into these issues as well. Public narratives or folk lore, like those surrounding the "American Dream," might also cause social justice problems.[230]

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[230] I've always found these sorts of public stories to be examples of the "no true Scotsman" fallacy. The American Dream tells us the story of people who work hard and make it in the end. The lesson

Avoiding charges of both manipulation and paternalism will likely go far in avoiding social justice issues as well, but the specific burdens or advantages we place on particular groups through the use of narrative should be considered in its own right. For example, teachers should be aware of the power and limitations of narrative transport, and structure lessons that utilize narrative so that non-narrative illustrations and discussions reinforce the messages meant to be conveyed with each story. Understanding that not everyone will get the same thing out of a story, just as not everyone may be able to understand one way of presenting a lesson, will go far in helping those who are unable to experience the effects of narrative transport.

On the larger scale, there needs to be a higher level of what I might call "transport literacy" within the general population so they, as well as regulatory bodies, can be more aware of predatory or unfair uses of transport in both advertising and governmental programs. Given that research shows belief, attitude, and intention changes can persist even after participants have been told a narrative was a lie or inaccurate, it is imperative that we ensure narratives are used in mindful and ethical ways. With a little effort, I believe most potential narrative transport social justice issues can be avoided.

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many learn is that those who don't make it must not have worked hard enough. Those people then aren't "real Americans." There is a lot of this thinking going around these days, sadly.

Harm

We can't ignore the fact that there might exist situations in which narrative transport is used in ways that avoid charges of manipulation, paternalism, and social justice issues, but still finds itself ethically problematic. For instance, suppose an advertising company puts together a narrative-based ad campaign that managers to avoid meddling with the autonomy of those who experience it while still having the desired effect of persuading people to buy the product it portrays. Suppose also that it avoids any charges of paternalism and social justice issues as they have been presented above. The problem is that the ad happens to be for a particular brand of cigarettes and the increased business results in negative health outcomes for the newly acquired customers. What are we to make of such a situation?[231]

Independent of the ethical concerns discussed thus far, we should be cognizant of the harms that could result from the use of narrative transport as a persuasive technique. Although manipulation, paternalism, and social justice violations could easily themselves be construed as harms, it is worth noting that harm can exist independent of these sorts of violations and should be considered a category of potential ethical issues on its own. Anytime we intentionally try to alter the mental states or behavior of

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[231] Sadly, this is not a hypothetical situation, as Marlboro, through their depictions of the life of the Marlboro Man, and Camel, through their depictions of Joe Camel, certainly utilized narrative-based techniques to sell cigarettes. Even if these campaigns managed to avoid manipulation, paternalism, and social justice issues (which I do not think they could) the harm they cause customers makes them immoral in and of itself.

anyone, whether it's through rational persuasion, nudging, or even narrative transport, we need to take seriously the repercussions those alterations can have.

Although the issue of harm might appear to be largely self-explanatory, I would like to highlight two main types of harm that might arise from the use of narrative transport: direct harm and indirect harm. Direct harm is more straightforward and showcased in the example of the cigarette ad campaign mentioned above. On my view, direct harm occurs when the altered mental state or behavior itself gives rise to the harm. This is not meant to be a full-fledged definition of causation, but rather a sort of layman, ad-hoc definition. For instance, I take the link between cigarette smoking and negative health outcomes to be a paradigmatic example of direct harm even though it could be argued that there are numerous intermediate steps between the act of smoking a cigarette and the harmful outcome. In this way, I am utilizing a sort of reasonable person standard when it comes to determining what constitutes "direct." Nor am I aiming to reinvent the wheel with regard to a definition of harm. As such, I generally follow John Stuart Mill's approach in using "harm" as a term meant to capture bad consequences that generally violate or threaten to violate the interests of others.[232] I believe this understanding of harm is enough to move us along.

With this conception in mind, there are many different forms that direct harm can take. The most obvious sort of direct harm is likely physical, illustrated by the

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[232] Mill, J. (2011). On Liberty (Cambridge Library Collection - Philosophy). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

negative health outcomes associated with smoking cigarettes, but there may also be instances of psychological harm, social harm, financial harm, and many others. For instance, a narrative that persuades readers to believe that murderers are on the loose in their area, whether true or not, may result in high degrees of fear and anxiety.[233] So, too, might narratives inspire individuals to invest in ways that result in financial ruin or to engage with others in ways that harm their relationships.[234] As different as these examples may be, what they hold in common is that the narrative influenced a change in a belief or behavior, and it is that change that resulted in the harm.

Indirect harms are less straightforward and perhaps less common, but they are certainly worth considering. Once again, I find the nudge literature illuminative here. As Luc Bovens points out in *The Ethics of Nudge*, and was alluded to above, indirect harm is "difficult to assess empirically, but it is nonetheless a concern that does not go away."[235] What Bovens has in mind here is that the widespread use of nudge techniques might cause an overall "infantilization effect" within society, creating a population of people who can no longer make decisions for themselves. On this example, it isn't so much the nudge that directly causes the harm, but rather the nudge causes an alteration to the culture of a society, or to the overall disposition or habits of the individuals, and it is

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[233] Here I am thinking of the narrative "Murder at the Mall" used by Green and Brock in their seminal 2000 studies.
[234] How many financial lives have been harmed by success stories that convinced people to join pyramid schemes?
[235] Till Grüne-Yanoff and S.O. Hansson (2008) Preference Change: Approaches from Philosophy, Economics and Psychology, Berlin and New York: Springer, Theory and Decision Library A, Chapter 10.

these changes, over time, that give rise to the harm. Even if the nudge doesn't directly harm the one being nudged, it does contribute to the overall situation that is harmful.

On the face of it, this worry might seem far-fetched and like something out of a dystopian story and so not to be taken seriously. However, I do believe it is worth considering. Philosophers like Albert Borgmann have, convincingly, I believe, argued that modern technological culture impacts us in ways that might be deeply, morally problematic.[236] If this is at least possible, it is also possible that the widespread use of nudges, or narratives, to sway opinions could have unintended consequences that cause indirect harm. We might also imagine situations in which narratives are so powerful that they effectively crowd out less effective, but more accurate, modes of presentation. Suppose two politicians are vying for popularity, one using primarily narratives with dubious imbedded messages and the other using primarily sound arguments. If narrative works far better than argument then we might cultivate a society in which people pay no attention to arguments, though they may contain better information, and only listen to narratives, regardless of the quality of the imbedded information. Such a situation would be, I believe, highly troubling.

Consider also harms that are experienced by those other than the actual person who was persuaded by the narrative. For example, as I discussed above, I became an insufferable jerk after reading *Atlas Shrugged*. That narrative influenced a number of

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[236] Borgmann, Albert. Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2003

changes in my beliefs and personality that resulted in harm to many of my friends and

family members.[237] Changes in mental states and behavior are not always only harmful

to the person being changed, but also to those who have to experience the

ramifications of those changes.

If we are to wield the powers of narrative transport ethically, we must, to the

best of our abilities, take into account the foreseeable direct and indirect harms that

may result. Of course, there may always be some degree of harm that accompanies a

shift in mental states brought about by narrative transport, and so total avoidance of all

harm might be impossible in many situations. After all, something as seemingly benign

as a small shift in attitude could spiral into a larger, unforeseen effect. We are not mind

readers and we cannot see the future. However, in using any technique that has the

potential of making lasting changes to human psychology and behavior, as narrative

transport undeniably can, we must do our due diligence in conducting an analysis of the

costs and benefits associated with exposure to our intentionally crafted narrative. What

changes are we hoping to influence with the narrative? What direct and indirect harms

are possible? Do the benefits of these hoped-for changes outweigh the potential harms

we can reasonably foresee? These are the questions we must ask ourselves if we want

to be ethical stewards of the power inherent in narrative transport.

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[237] I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to any and all people who encountered
objectivist Chris and were worse off for it.

Authenticity

I would like to finish this discussion with a worry that departs from the general tenor of our investigation thus far. Even though I strongly believe in the beneficial power of narrative, much in the same way that Nussbaum does, I have a hard time shaking a lingering concern. Even if we manage to avoid the ethical pitfalls I've outlined above, even if we convincingly structure our narratives such that no one could reasonably say we are acting in a manipulative or paternalistic manner or that we are running afoul of social justice or causing harm, there still might exist an unease with the use of narrative transport. This unease, I believe, may stem from the difficult to articulate feeling that the mental states and behaviors influenced by narrative transport are in some way not genuine, that they do not in the proper way mesh with the other elements of our psychology or are the result of an alien acquisition process. In short, my feelings of uncomfortableness that surround the use of narrative transport can most easily be understood as worries over authenticity.

On the face of it, worries of authenticity might appear simply to be repackaged worries of manipulation and paternalism. Although I would agree the concerns have some overlap in terms of domain in that both take as target the method in which our mental states are produced, the worry that we may not be adhering to an ideal of authenticity is a unique issue. In a way, authenticity governs a larger domain than both manipulation and paternalism. As discussed above, to manipulate is to adjust the

psychological levers of an individual in an impermissible way, to hinder, rather than enhance, the inner machinery of an agent. To act paternalistically is to substitute your own judgement for someone else's, to override their liberty or autonomy for their own good. Metaphorically speaking, both cases involve tampering with machinery, either by directly affecting the way it operates or by bypassing its functioning altogether.

Expanding on this metaphor, what if we allow the machinery to function as intended and instead replace the upper management with people who think the way we do? We leave the machines alone, allowing them to operate as they are intended, but the new management we have put in place begins changing what those machines produce. This isn't quite manipulation, as we have left the machinery itself alone, nor is it quite paternalism, as we have fully engaged the machinery. Instead, it is something else. Much in the same way that a company might not feel quite right after replacing its CEO, as was the case for many when Apple's Steve Jobs tragically died from pancreatic cancer and was replaced by Tim Cook, so, too, might a person not feel quite right after experiencing the effects of narrative transport. It is similar to the way I felt when my submarine changed captains during my military service or the gradual shift in the feeling of my graduate program as the faculty and graduate students within it were replaced over time. In all these cases, whether it's a company, a military ship, or an academic department, something important changed, but it didn't have anything to do with it's basic functioning or operation. Rather, they didn't feel like themselves anymore, and that feeling, I believe, is related to the worry I have about narrative transport.

This section is not meant to stand as moral condemnation of narrative transport per se, but rather as a way to flag a moral unease I feel with the way it is discussed within the literature, including my own contribution here. Take my own study in chapter 3, for example. I took a group of participants and intentionally used a technique shown to lower critical cognitive engagement and counter arguing to make those people donate more money to charity, if only slightly. Even if this is not manipulative or paternalistic, there is something that feels "off" about this to me. How authentic are those desires to give to charity? Even if they persist over time, do those desires properly represent who that person is? We hear cries of inauthenticity in apologies regularly: I'm sorry I said that, I wasn't acting like myself; forgive me, I was drunk, that's not really me; I can't believe I did this, it isn't who I really am. Feeling like our thoughts, attitudes, or behavior doesn't adequately align with who we perceive ourselves to be is distressing, and I wonder if narrative transport might strive for this very psychological dissonance.

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor expresses the value of authenticity in a passage that warrants quoting in its entirety:

Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals

of self-fulfillment or self-realization in which it is usually couched. This is the

background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity.[238]

The question I am left with is whether the changes in beliefs, attitudes, emotions,
intentions, and behavior brought about by narrative transport are, as Taylor says, true
to the changed person's own originality and properly their own. To what degree are we
perhaps harming a person's authenticity by using narrative transport to sway them in
potentially inauthentic ways?

Although I once again fear I cannot give a complete answer, I do believe I can
offer some guidance in how to think about this ethical worry. The solution, as is the case
with so many ethical issues, boils down to motivation and intention. Remember back to
Nussbaum's original call for narrative to play a central role in our social education.
Narrative, on her view, allows for the cultivation of the literary imagination, an ability
that moves us away from the cold, instrumental reasoning of *Hard Times*'s Gradgrind
and towards an empathetic, collaborative view of the world. Narrative forces us to see
the world metaphorically, to see value in things in themselves, and to wonder about the
inner lives of others and to take that inner life into account. We are asked to see others
as the individuals they are and not just as repositories for exogenous interests and
desires. Nussbaum argues that narratives make us see others as authentic individuals, as

[238] Taylor, Charles, **The Ethics of Authenticity**. Cambridge, Mass. :Harvard University Press,
1991. Pg. 29

beings brimming with potentiality that is properly their own, as having lives that only

they could properly fully articulate and bring into existence for themselves. In essence,

Nussbaum believes that narrative helps us recognize and respect the authenticity of

others, and in doing so, we become fully flourishing members of our social, democratic

communities.

Which is why we must be careful with using narrative transport in the ways it has

been described in this dissertation. Wielding narrative as a way of changing the inner

lives and behavior of others is to use the sort of instrumental reasoning that Nussbaum

so desperately wants to avoid. It runs the risk of running counter to the very things that

make narrative so wonderful, and it is this where my unease with its use truly originates.

To use narrative transport with the express purpose of swaying people's beliefs,

attitudes, and behavior is to run the risk of seeing them as beings with preferences that

can be exogenously given, of seeing them as inputs in a calculation that can be

manipulated, and risks failing to see them as agents worthy of articulating and defining

their lives for themselves. In effect, using narrative in this way risks running contrary to

the very things that make narrative wonderful and worthwhile in the first place.

As with so many of the important things in life, I worry there may be no concrete

way to avoid these concerns. Instead, I hope the very articulation of the worry will act as

a beacon to help us wade through these murky ethical waters. I'm reminded here of

Albert Borgmann's helpful distinction between regardless power and careful power

couched in his discussion of modernity and technological culture. Borgmann tells us that

"we exercise [regardless power] when we act on the basis of scientific insight by way of engineering or organization in order to produce a result regardless of the recalcitrance or variety of circumstances."[239] Regardless power is a way to bend the world, or in this case others, to our will, and to fail to see their humanity as it should properly be viewed. On the other side, careful power is to respond to other's humanity by acknowledging it and letting it be, allowing it, as Nussbaum suggests, to exists on it's own right and to be valuable in and of itself.

What I am suggesting is that to properly use narrative transport we must wield it with careful power. This requires us to never use it as a tool to implement cold, utilitarian rational choice styles of thinking, but as a means of recognizing and enhancing the inner lives of others, in whatever direction that might take them. The problem with the ideal of authenticity, as Taylor explains, is that we so easily slide into the belief that to be authentic is to be isolated from others, to see yourself as a sort of sui generis, unreliant on anyone but oneself. The truth, however, is that no one is an island and that an authentic self requires a web of others to help us on our way. Narrative, I believe, can provide this vital assistance we all need to become our best, authentic selves, but only if we approach it with the proper mindset and care.

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[239] Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2003 Pg. 88

Conclusion

Determining whether a particular narrative is manipulative, paternalistic, harmful, or risks causing issues with regard to social justice or authenticity is a difficult and highly contextual affair. There is no way, I believe, to make a blanket statement that absolutely applies to all narratives used in every situation. Nor, do I believe, is this an exhaustive list of all the potential ethical issues surrounding the use of narrative as a persuasive tool. As our understanding of narrative transport grows through further research, so too shall our understanding of the ethical implications of its deployments. This chapter is intended merely as a primer for a much longer journey we shall have to embark upon as a global society.

At the end our journey into the nature of narrative and narrative transport I return to where I began, with Nussbaum's insistence that exposure to narratives, and particularly novels, provides insights that play a role in the construction of adequate moral and political theories and that narratives also aid in the development of moral capacities that help in the execution of those moral and political theories. I hope that through the course of this journey we've taken together I have convinced you that her view is largely correct. Narratives do in fact have the ability to change us in important and profound ways, not just by making a certain product appear more appealing or by providing respite from the difficulties of the real world around us, but by altering our

very inner lives through the shifting of beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior. As I've tried to demonstrate in my own studies, narrative transport can even impact our moral views and behaviors. In this way, Nussbaum is correct in zeroing in on narrative as a way of instilling widespread change on the deeply moral level she wants. Narrative is powerful, and Nussbaum is right to demand we take it more seriously as a method of moral pedagogy.

But what has also come out of our investigation is that the content of the narrative makes a tremendous difference. The changes a person experiences are typically story-consistent, and as such, the messages or information embedded within the content of a narrative can make all the difference in the changes a transported individual will experience. Whether a person has been manipulated is largely a matter of whether the shifted beliefs and attitudes align with their respective ideals, but it is the content of the narrative that ultimately determines what the person's beliefs and attitudes shift to. Similarly, a narrative might be harmful in that it disseminates toxic false information, or it might exploit vulnerable populations by pushing beliefs that align with the majority or status quo. But again, in each of these instances it is the content of the narrative that determines what the shifted beliefs will be, and thus the content is largely responsible for whether the use of the narrative becomes ethically problematic.

Without the distinction between form and content, from what I call the cultivation of the literary theory of mind and the content that directs its use, it is difficult to suss out these ethical problems. If it is the very form of narrative itself that

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confers the benefits, as Nussbaum suggests, then we struggle to explain how *Hard Times* can be so beneficial while *The Klansman* is certainly not. Nussbaum is not, nor would I ever want to suggest that she is, claiming that all narratives, including books like *The Klansman* or films like *Triumph of the Will*, are beneficial. Rather, I'm claiming that, without the distinctions I've made, it is difficult to see why these types of narratives can be harmful on her view.

Ultimately, I believe that the empirical research largely vindicates Nussbaum's claims, particularly that narrative can be a force for good in the world. As my own research how suggested, it might even be the case that narrative is a more powerful tool than argumentation, at least in some situations. What I can say for sure is that my studies have added empirical support to the idea that narratives can play a role in changing us in a moral sense. More research needs to be done, but hopefully my work can be but one more stone in a foundation of future investigation into the powerful nature of narrative and how it impacts our moral lives.

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