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**Is There Such a Thing as Narrative Explanation?
(Abstract)**

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Some narratives are explanatory, and some explanations are given by narrating. But are there explanations which are explanatory *because* they are narratives, as many seem to think? In this paper, I analyse and reject the idea that such special, narrative explanations exist.

Since the concepts of narrative and explanation are contested, both concepts need to be explicated in order to investigate whether narrative explanations exist. As for explanation, the idea that some narratives are explanatory because they are narratives is often expressed by saying that the narrative form contributes to the explanatory force of the explanation. Unfortunately, the notion of explanatory force is but a rather vague picture. It is not entirely clear what a contribution to explanatory force might consist in. After explicating what counts as an explanation, I therefore propose to substitute the notion of explanatory force by a more precise account. The one that is chosen for the purposes of this paper (but not the only possible choice) is van Fraassen's account: explanations are seen as at least answers to how-questions or why-questions which are relevant for the *explanandum* in the right way. From this, the tasks follow for anyone claiming that some explanations explain because they are narrative: an explanation which is explanatory because it is a narrative should, firstly, be an answer to a why- or how-question which is relevant to the *explanandum* in a way that can be traced back to defining or typical features of narratives. Secondly, the explanation should not be reducible to other well-known ways in which explanations can be relevant for their respective questions, such as causality. Thirdly, the explanation should be able to deal with the typical problems of theories of explanation, i. e. they should be able to deal with the canonical list of problem cases for any theory of explanation from the debate in the philosophy of science.

My explication of the notion of narrative already stands in this context. In order to find relevance relations between answers to how/why-questions and *explananda* which could make an explanation essentially *narrative*, I search popular conditions for ›narrative‹ given by Lamarque, Henning and Ryan. ›Narrative‹ has been defined in quite different ways. Definitions of ›narrative‹ especially differ in complexity. Lamarque's definition is chosen because it is minimal in this respect. Henning's definition, on the other hand, is arguably the most complex definition available at the moment. To show that these definitions probably exhaust the possible candidates for relevance relations, they are complemented by a list of definitorial features by Ryan, who in turn compiled many modern definitions. The three definitions of ›narrative‹ give us a list of six relevance relations: sequentiality, i. e. a narrative explanation is explanatory because it lists a sequence of events leading up to the *explanandum*; meaningful connection, i. e. a narrative explanation is explanatory because it shows the *explanandum* to be connected to other events in a meaningful way; storyness, which consists in the combination of the first two candidates; intentionality, i. e. a narrative explanation is explanatory because it gives someone's reasons for bringing about the *explanandum*; dramaticity, i. e. a narrative explanation is explanatory because it puts the *explanandum* at the end of an emotional sequence; and closure/completeness, i. e. a narrative explanation is explanatory because it puts the *explanandum* at the end of a story.

In the main part of the paper, these inherently narrative candidates are then identified in the literature on narrative explanation, and I subsequently ask whether they can provide a relevance relation between *explanandum* and *explanans* which fulfils the three conditions given above for any explanation that is explanatory because it is narrative. As it turns out, none of them fulfils even the first two of the three conditions. Essentially, three types of problems befall the candidates. Some, like sequentiality, cannot guarantee that a narrative is explanatory. One can provide counterexamples of narrative sequences which are not explanatory. Others, like meaningful connection, turn out to be mere placeholder terms for a relevance relation, i. e. they do not tell us what the relevance relation consists in. Some candidates can be reduced to well-known relevance relations like causality, thereby giving up on the idea that narrative explanation is different from other types of explanation. Finally, some candidates display a mix of all these problems. I conclude that there is no special type of explanation which is explanatory because it is narrative.

The last section of the paper then situates these considerations in their historical contexts, starting with Hempel's theory of explanation. The question is asked why the idea of a special, narrative type of explanation seemed attractive in the first place. I come up with three tentative answers: the widespread discontent with Hempel's theory of scientific explanation, the availability of narrative as an obvious but allegedly underrated aspect of explanations, and the availability of a list of candidates for which narrative explanation was supposed to work. None of these historical reasons, however, is ultimately conclusive.

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