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More artful methods: Techniques of narrative in argumentation

Summary

The title, and inspiration, for this talk is drawn from a confession of Daniel Dennett at the start of one of his books, in which he writes that in order to get people to think seriously about ideas he cannot use formal argument, because people will not be swayed by that. He has to use "more artful methods"; he has to "tell a story." The contrast between formal argument and story as methods of persuasion is suggestive and worth exploring. But in shifting attention on to the narrative as Dennett does, some interesting questions are encouraged: What is the persuasive nature of narrative? And how do narratives address audiences argumentatively? To provide responses to these questions, I take up some cases of narratives that have been used to persuasive effect. I then place these analyses within a larger project that has been occupying me: describing the nature and power of the cognitive environments in which we interact. This in turn allows me to discuss various devices with both narrative and argumentative import, like allusions and memes, the second of which was adopted by Dennett.

Key words: argumentation, cognitive environments, narratives, stories

1. INTRODUCTION

Who can resist a good story? Our cultures abound in them, are ground in them, and values are found in them. We use them to entertain, to teach, and to illustrate. And we use them to persuade, as Daniel Dennett does in *Darwin's dangerous idea*, or as argumentation theorist Igor Žagar does in arguing for the scalar effect of *topoi*, as he grounds his account in a story from Ducrot.[1]

In spite of it being only a recent target for the incisive analyses of argumentation theorists, the treatment of narratives as arguments has a storied, if overlooked, history in Western philosophy. Aristotle reminds us that the human being is, by nature, an imitative animal. And part of the proof of this is the pleasure we take from telling stories (*Poetics* 1448b4-8). As such a fundamental aspect of our being, we should expect that this tendency will manifest itself in a full range of human activities, including arguing. But even before Aristotle, and in spite of his general dismissal of poetry, Plato adopted the strategy of pressing a case by presenting both an argument and then a story,[2] as if he was concerned to impact the widest possible audience.

From a different perspective the interest in narrative as an alternative to argument has been raised by such contemporary thinkers as Daniel Dennett and Jorge Luis Borges. Borges, for example, echoing Emerson, insists that "arguments convince nobody. They convince nobody because they are presented as arguments. Then we look at them, we weigh them, we turn them over, and we decide against them" (Borges, 2000, p. 31). There is likely an element of exaggeration in this remark, since if arguments convinced *nobody* they would be unlikely to receive the attention (scholarly and otherwise) that they do. But a weaker claim that might be attributed to Borges here is that a certain type of argument lacks persuasive power. The traditional formal argument, for example, may have great pedagogical value but would rarely carry the day in a debate.

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[1] Zagar (2008) grounds his account on Ducrot's story of the policeman, who adjusts his judgement according to the *topos* on which he depends.

[2] This may be a strategy he borrowed from Protagoras, since there is a particularly forceful example in the dialogue named after that sophist where both an argument and then a story/myth is related. But we see Plato himself adopting such a strategy among his panoply of rhetorical devices, as when he witnesses the processes after death and returns to tell the tale, a story that complements the arguments for adopting the role of the just person.

In *Darwin's dangerous idea* (1995), Dennett writes:

> I have learned that arguments, no matter how watertight, often fall on deaf ears. I am myself the author of arguments that I consider rigorous and unanswerable but that are often not so much rebutted or even dismissed as simply ignored. I am not complaining about injustice – we all must ignore arguments, and no doubt we all ignore arguments that history will tell us we should have taken seriously. Rather, I want to play a more direct role in changing what is ignorable by whom. I want to get thinkers in other disciplines to take evolutionary thinking seriously, to show them how they have been underestimating it, and to show them why they have been listening to the wrong sirens. For this, I have to use more artful methods. I have to tell a story. You don't want to be swayed by a story? Well, I *know* you won't be swayed by a formal argument; you won't even *listen* to a formal argument for my conclusion, so I start where I have to start (Dennett, 1995, p. 12).

Admittedly, Dennett is talking here about technical philosophical arguments which may, on the best day, command only a limited audience. But more interesting, I believe, is the dichotomous thinking at work here: argument *or* story, but not both. Left aside is the argumentative power of the story itself.

In this paper I am interested in this power. More particularly, I want to ask what is the "value-added" component of narrative argument? Why do arguers adopt the strategy of resorting to narratives and what do they expect to accomplish by doing so? This is the kind of question that has been addressed, if only implicitly but certainly successfully, by those working on visual argumentation. It amounts to being able to show that there is something left should one attempt to "reduce" a visual or narrative argument to its propositional "core." And that "something" has force such that the argument would not be as effective – would not be *the* argument – without it.

2. NARRATIVE ARGUMENT

Let me first deal with the preliminary question of whether there are narrative arguments. What would such involve?

Of course, there are different definitions of *argument*, but generally, as an activity, it is the attempt to bring an audience to consider or accept, or act on some claim or proposal. And it is, importantly, a reason-giving activity. This means that arguments, as artefacts or products, must contain some components that constitute

the claim or proposal and some components that constitute the reasons. These dual requirements actually allow a lot of leeway, to which I will return below. They do not, for example, limit us to collections of propositions which we could then determine to be true or false.

Consider, as an example, the following discourse from the Chinese scholar and sage Mencius (1999):

> Probably in the ancient times there were people who did not bury their dead parents. When a parent died, he or she was thrown into a gully. Then one day when the son passed there, the dead body was being eaten by foxes and sucked by flies and gnats. A cold sweat exuded from the brows of the son, who looked away, unable to bear the sight. The sweat was not exuded for others to see, but was an expression of his inmost heart. Probably he went home to fetch basket and spade for the burial. It was really right for him to do so. So it is reasonable that all filial sons and benevolent men should bury the remains of their parents. [1999, p. 125].

Mencius clearly puts forward a claim or proposal: it is reasonable that all filial sons and benevolent men should bury the remains of their parents. It even has a conclusion indicator – so – that informal logicians are fond of identifying. And there is premise material here in the account of the son's experience and actions. The entire argument here is a story – a story with a moral that commands action. Mencius argues that it is reasonable that "all filial sons and benevolent men should bury the remains of their parents," and his "evidence" for this conclusion is a speculative story about how such a practice would probably have come about. There is no attempt to suggest a "truth" to this account. It depends for its force on what is probable. To test such "evidence," an audience has to measure what is suggested against their experience of likelihoods and determine whether the likelihood is strong in this case. In fact, we can see how such stories would then proliferate in legal reasoning, where a jury is asked to imagine the likely order of events that have led to the occurrence that is under scrutiny by the court. Aristotle's invocation that stories should express what follows necessarily or according to probability suggests that experience has a certain logical coherence. This is a feature of the most compelling stories we tell. It gives them plausibility, and such plausibility is a central criterion for "good" narrative arguments (Olmos, 2013). In Gil Plumer's (2011) terms this plausibility is a "realistic believability," where the fictive gains real world credence. Given this, we can assign such arguments a place in

the growing accounts of argumentation schemes, where it fits as an "argument from example" (Olmos, 2014, p. 191).

Mencius' story, moreover, is more than a simple description of probable events: it evokes pathos. The cold sweat that the son experiences, which was an expression of his emotional reaction, conveys a sense of horror and thereby captures something of the shared values of arguer and audience. Now the audience is invited not just to match the coherence of the account with their experience but also to feel what the fictitious son felt.

3. CRITICAL OBJECTIONS

Early accounts of narrative or *narratio* are understood in terms of a setting out of the facts (Olmos, 2013), and more generally, a recounting of a "concrete event" is deemed important for there to be a narrative at all (Olmos, 2014, p. 202). This certainly differs from the fictive telling of a story like the one provided by Mencius that tries to draw an audience in through some lesson learned or an illustrated claim. But as Kvernbekk (2003) points out, there is no generally agreed view of narratives in the vast literature on narrative theory. So we must stipulate the kinds of limitations that are engaged when we explore narratives and arguments. We do want to include the fictional story, for example, even the longer "story" of the novel (Plumer, 2015). But we also want to include the narrative reports of the historian and the thought experiment of the philosopher (or argumentation theorist, as per Ducrot). Indeed, narratives are devices used across the social and natural sciences, comparable in this respect to arguments. Perhaps it is too early in our analyses to be definitive about the meaning of "narrative" here.[3]

Each of the very different uses of narration, though, falls prey to the kinds of barriers that have been erected by argumentation theorists to prevent the treatment of narratives as arguments or at least to police the situation with strict conditions that would have to be met before a narrative qualifies. Essentially, these conditions reduce to demands that narratives fit the structure of arguments in order to qualify as argumentative. That is, they must have a claim and supporting premises.

[3] A good working understanding of narration, and one consistent with the view Kvernbekk expounds, is provided by van den Hoven (2015): "a mental scheme in terms of which we 'understand' an act as caused by something that went before and leading to something that will follow" (2015, p. 120).

We find this prescription, for example, in the treatment offered by Kvernbekk in her paper "Narratives as informal arguments" (2003) and in what Govier and Ayers (2012) describe as the "core" of an argument.

Drawing from Salmon (1984), Kvernbekk defines "argument" as "a group of statements standing in relation to each other. Among the basic terms are conclusion, premise, (causal) inference and evidence" (Kvernbekk, 2003, p. 1). In her judgment, a core issue in deciding whether narratives can be construed as arguments is the nature of the relation between premises and conclusion. In particular, she sees theorists offering distinctions between theoretical and practical arguments, with different criteria suggested for each. For example: are reasons offered as justifications for how we act, or are reasons offered for what we believe? (2003, p. 5).

Kvernbekk allows that like arguments, narratives have conclusions, but she challenges the idea that they will have a similar premise-conclusion relation: "it hardly seems likely that the premise-conclusion relation found in narratives is similar to that found in informal arguments, although this of course depends on what one takes an informal argument to be" (2003, p. 8). This is because of the way she understands narratives as products configured in hindsight: "In a narrative, the conclusion is known for a fact. It exists as something that happened before we can tell a story about it" (Kvernbekk, 2003, p. 8). Arguments, she insists, use premises to take an audience to a conclusion that is not yet known or held, they provide justification for a claim. But narratives have conclusions that are already known to be true and do not require justifying or warranting. She concludes: "*If* the point of arguments is to show that knowing the premises warrants knowing the conclusion, and *if* this justificatory relationship of premises to conclusion is at the heart of the very definition of an argument, *then* I conclude that narratives are not arguments, formal or informal" (Kvernbekk, 2003, p. 8). Much here depends on her understanding of narratives, in particular, in linking them with hindsight. One of the few things that "virtually all narrativists" (2003, p. 6) agree about is that the establishing of plots take place in hindsight. The narrator constructs the narrative with knowledge of the end result or closure of the plot. There are two things we might note about this: (i) it offers us a very narrow view of narrative, one that we should not acquiesce to if we want to appreciate the range of ways narratives might work as arguments. She seems to narrow the discourse of interest to the relation of facts, fictional or otherwise. The thought

experiment, for example, would appear to be a use of narrative that falls outside of this. (ii) Secondly, even if the narrator knows the outcome, the same would not necessarily hold for the audience. The justification is still required to bring them to see what the narrator has already seen. That's why so much testimonial evidence is narrative in nature. And the "result" at stake may not be a straightforward fact, as we saw with Mencius' recommendation and justification of an action. The latter certainly suggests that narratives may have specific value in practical arguments.[4]

This is also relevant when we turn to the analysis provided by Govier and Ayers (2012), since they are particularly interested in parables, which are typically thought to convey a message. They are not dismissive of the roles that narratives can play in argumentation. "Some narratives," for example, "play important rhetorical roles in contexts where arguments are offered, adding interest and vividness" (2012, p. 162), and stories about an individual case are often useful. But they question whether we can extract from a narrative an argument that expresses the point of the narrative, as supported by the events recounted (n. 2). Their principal means of exploring this issue is to ask whether parables provide good reasons for what they advocate. The stress on good reasons is important for them, because the danger is that we might otherwise be persuaded on the basis of "vividness and appeal" (2012, p. 163).

They view narratives in a way similar to Kvernbekk: narratives involve a series of events with a beginning, middle, and end, and which may relate the experiences of the narrator. Should that be the case, we would again be looking at a discourse constructed from a point of closure. They can be fictional or non-fictional. A parable is short and simple, and relates events that are familiar or accessible to the audience.

These definitions are useful; that of "argument" is crucial: "The point of an argument is not to tell a story that goes in some direction to a resolution but rather to *provide reasons* to support a claim that is in question" (Govier & Ayers, 2012, p. 165). Claims are made to offer reasons for further claims, premises and conclusions. This is the logical core of an argument, some components of which could be implicit.[5]

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[4] Kvernbekk does allow in her conclusion that narratives can be used to portray various reasoning processes, but remains sceptical as to whether narratives can provide reasons for their conclusions (because she sees them as explanatory rather than justificatory).

[5] But not *all* of them. They do not allow that all arguments could be expressed visually or through other non-verbal means.

From a logical point of view, certain concerns arise, and the first of these has to do with the scope of the conclusion. Many of the narratives involved in parables are personal, or involve individual examples. If the conclusion then generalizes from such an instance, there is the possibility of a fallacy of hasty conclusion (where a conclusion is drawn on the basis of insufficient evidence). And if the narrative is to represent further cases (as by analogy), we should ask how representative it is.

This second conclusion may be due to the strict requirements that they impose on their arguments. In each case, they convert them into propositional form, identifying premises and conclusions. And these propositional forms invariably reflect known argument structures. What this illustrates is the problem familiar to proponents of visual arguments: the tendency, insistence even, to require that if something is to count as an argument it must be possible to frame it in, or "reduce" it to, propositions. And those propositions can then be tested for logical cogency in terms of their internal relations. If we are to resist this tendency, we need to widen our understanding of argument, claiming for narratives what has been claimed for visuals.[6] For example, recall that Govier and Ayers place emphasis on the argument's core. In identifying a core, they also suggest that there are non-core elements, and these they provide in a footnote: emotional indicators, counter-considerations, and also jokes or illustrative anecdotes (2012, p. 166, n. 9). In fact, the footnote includes among the non-core items "attempts to rebut actual and potential objections to the premises, conclusion, or line of reasoning." Such a remark evokes Ralph Johnson's (2000) dialectical tier where such objections are considered and rebutted. But it is to be noted that while his dialectical tier could be set against the illative core of an argument (and thus be considered non-core), he still considers it an essential part of the argument and extends his considerations of cogency to it. Albeit the suggestion there might be that he is adding dialectical criteria to the logical core. But the distinction between such "parts" of an argument can be hard to maintain (Tindale, 2002), and the suggestion that there can be criteria beyond the logical involved in the evaluation of arguments is enough to encourage the consideration of other non-logical criteria. Once such a consideration is allowed, the decision of what is core and what is non-core is open to debate.

[6] I am not suggesting that narratives and visuals work in the same ways, only that they share non-traditional features that recommend a certain similarity of treatment.

As long as traditional core criteria dominate accounts such as those of Kvernbekk and Govier & Ayers, then the analyst can demand of the text, "what are the premises?", and in the absence of a suitable response, reject the candidate. The problem is similar to the treatment of images as arguments. The difference, of course, lies in the discourse-basis of the narrative and the different genres involved. But this just serves to identify the frustration experienced when trying to account for narratives in terms of the genre of argumentation. Because if we do identify the premises and the claim they support, then we have indeed an argument. But what is left of the narrative? It has been absorbed in the argument (one genre consumed by the other). Or, more to the point, what is left that is of importance for the narrative to contribute in evaluating the strength of the discourse? What much of this suggests is that whether narratives can work as arguments will depend very much on how we construe "argument."

Georges Roque (2015) challenges what a number of proponents of visual arguments have come to call "linguistic imperialism." Given that the standard way of expressing arguments has been verbally, we should not be surprised if an assumption has emerged that that is the *only*, or the *primary*, or the *normal* way of expressing arguments. As Roque conveys this, "verbal language would be the paradigm for understanding and analyzing the whole universe of meaning" (2015, p. 181). The whole business is complicated further by the associated assumption that the language of thought is propositional.

From the point of view of informal logic, the case of J. Anthony Blair (which Roque reviews) is instructive. Roque had taken his working definition of "argument" from Johnson and Blair (2006),[7] so his account is rooted in an informal logic perspective. In one of his first ventures into the question of visual argument, Blair (1996) observes that a visual argument would have to be non-propositional if it were to be a radically different kind of argument (if it is not different, then it can be "reduced to propositions and assessed that way"). But an argument is always a propositional entity, so the visual is either propositional or not an argument (cited in Roque, 2015, p. 179). This is clearly the kind of assumption about arguments that drives the discussions of Kvernbekk and Govier & Ayers. But in a later paper (Blair, 2004), he revises this position, now allowing that some visual images could figure in

[7] That is, "a claim, together with one or more sets of reasons offered by someone to support that claim" (Johnson & Blair, 2006, p. 10).

arguments. The reasoning that leads to this change of perspective is related to the use of arguments. We do not just use arguments to assert truths; we also use them to change an audience's attitudes or behaviour. But such things (attitudes and so forth) do not have a truth value. And so it would follow that not all verbal arguments are propositional (unless we want to say that advocacy arguments and other arguments promoting actions are not arguments at all).

This is a position on which Roque (2015) builds. He adds two further considerations. (i) Can propositions capture all the cognitive processes images imply? (2015, p. 180). The literature is still being amassed that addresses this question. But there are sufficient results so far available to suggest that propositions cannot fully account for the cognitive material that images supply. (ii) Not all sentences express propositions. There are important differences between them, and one of those differences relates to the amount of interpretation and reconstruction of meaning that propositions require. There is a treacherous process involved in going from sentence to proposition:

> Most of the time, we need a triple process of translation: first, it is necessary to convert words into a sentence, second, the sentence into a proposition, and finally we need to structure the propositions into an argument. So, it would be inaccurate to consider the translation process as unique to images, since there is a comparable translation that takes place with words. (Roque, 2015, pp. 182–183).

The upshot of Roque's discussion is to, minimally, bring verbal arguments and visual arguments onto a level playing field. Neither has any prior claim to superior status such that one sets the standards by which the other should be identified and assessed.

Why should all this concern us since our interest is in narratives? Roque's subsequent examinations of two cases (and there are many comparable cases to be found in the visual argumentation literature) serve to show how images, like words with their associated meanings, have their lives in what I will shortly call the cognitive environment. In fact, his first example of a hand expressing the victory sign, with the other digits missing, illustrates how important it is to have an active audience assigning meaning through interpretation and reconstructing what they see as an argument. That is, the success of the "argument" depends on the role of the audience assigning appropriate meanings and drawing on the resources available to do so.

So several points might be transferred from Roque's arguments for visual argument to the current consideration of narratives. First, it must be observed that the general expansion of the idea of "argument" to include the non-verbal opens the notion of argument itself to further expansion. Furthermore, the observation that not all arguments can be reduced to the propositional undermines several of the conclusions drawn by people like Kvernbekk and Govier. But it should also be apparent that Roque's more specific conclusions about visual arguments are also transferable here. When he asks whether propositions capture all the cognitive processes images imply, we are invited to substitute narratives for images and ask whether anything is left behind in the analyses of Govier and Ayers. And when Roque observes that not all sentences express propositions, and thus are not to be assessed in terms of their truth-value, we are invited to consider whether narratives are being used to achieve other ends than truth, as in cases of advocacy.

4. THE CONCEPT OF ARGUMENT

Informal logicians themselves are aware that the transition from earlier conceptions of argument has not been complete or without problems. Johnson (2014), for example, notes that the "informal logic textbooks offer the reader an anemic conception of argument, one which does not differ markedly from that which appears (when it does appear) in other standard introductory logic textbooks, such as Copi; nor indeed from those on the FDL tradition" (2014, p. 79).

The focus, then, is still primarily on the product, and the concept is still largely a static one. What matters are the propositions in the form of premises and conclusions. As I note in the earlier sections of this paper, there are reasons to be concerned about this. How can the visual, for example, be an argument on the traditional model or even the informal logic model? Both "reduce" arguments to propositions. This brings us back to the question raised by Roque whether propositions are all there are as arguments. Is the propositional the "paradigm" case that anything (visual, narrative, and so forth) that purports to be an argument must reflect in some way? All this invites a typically philosophical investigation of the core versus the non-core, which would see the one perhaps displaced by the other. But we do not have to go so far; we can simply question the prejudicial nature of such a division that appears to exclude *in advance* anything that does not fit a definition of

argument that reaches back through the informal logic accounts into the traditional models that informal logic had professed to replace.

This more dynamic view of "argument" (in contrast to the static view noted above) is closely related to that which can be extracted from Aristotle. Adopting a rhetorical perspective on argumentation has always involved the recognition that an argument's purpose and not just its structure must be part of its definition. By that I mean, we have been used to defining an argument as a series of statements (minimally two), at least one of which (the premise) provided support for another (the conclusion), *and* it has the goal of persuading an audience. Bringing the audience into the conceptual field marks the engagement with rhetoric and the rich collection of ideas available from that tradition. But as we have seen, there is still a tendency to separate out the "structural" part of the definition and treat arguments in the static way, as mere products. This effectively tears the product from the process in which it was produced and pins it down for review and assessment, like a butterfly on a display board – colorful, perhaps, but also lifeless. When the argument is then analyzed it is so on its own terms and without sufficient regard for the situation that produced it, along with the participants involved in that situation. Treating arguments in this detached, static way amounts to a failure to recognize the dynamic nature of what is involved.

Stephen Toulmin hinted at what was at stake when he wrote: "An argument is like an organism" (1958, p. 87). In saying this he meant that it has parts, an integrated structure. Toulmin's statement further recalls the Aristotle of the *Poetics* describing the work of art like an organism, with head, body and tail. But, importantly, Aristotle also judged it to be like an animal because it was alive, another animated thing among animated things (1450b). The *Poetics*, with its demand for probable and necessary sequences in plots, evinces reasonableness here at the heart of the poetic – a moving train of logic. A plot recalls the nature of the syllogism when we learn that "if any part is displaced or deleted, the whole plot is disturbed and dislocated" (1451a).[8] But if the poetic has a movement, so too must logic itself: logic has a life, and its structures have internal movement. This sense needs to be transported to the study of argumentation. An argument is alive; it is a message (which would include images) of activated potential. To recall some particularly important Aristotelian terms that capture the

[8] Grube (1958) translation.

way he conceived natural and social objects, an argument is a potentiality (*dunamis*) and two actualities (*energeia*).

The relationship between these terms is complicated. Aristotle used it famously in *De Anima*, or 'On the soul', (1984a) as a way to capture the interactions of the parts of a human being (body and soul): a soul is the first actuality (activation) of a body that has life potentially. Then, the second actuality is any expression of that initial activation. For example, an eye (a "body") has the potential for sight (the first actuality) but may be asleep. When the eye is actively seeing it expresses the second actuality.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, especially in its third book, encouraged us to think of the ways in which rhetoric and arguments "activate" what is potential in the audience. What he called "bringing-before-the-eyes" was a way in which ideas are made present by being activated in an audience so that they attend to them and act upon them. This encourages us to adopt the language of potentiality and actuality for the processes in argumentation that are captured in the nature of "argument," viewed now as something dynamic. In argumentation, the first actuality is achieved in the movement within an argument from the premises to the conclusion (while there is not yet any uptake, any adoption (literally) of the claim involved). This internal movement already indicates the way in which an argument is alive with action, dynamic on its own terms. There is a movement from premises to conclusion that the mind follows, or, in Pinto's terms, is invited to follow.[9] This is the level of inferencing, of the illative core. Secondly, there is a movement toward the audience that has already been anticipated in the internal movements of the "core", insofar as the components have been chosen with the audience in mind. A further actuality corresponds to what arises in the audience, the one that adopts ideas in the process of "uptake." This uptake is a complicated matter that depends on many variables, including the arguer's skill at recognizing the audience and the means of persuasion available for that audience. But among the strategies that encourages this second actuality or uptake is the use of narrative. How this might work will be considered in subsequent sections of the paper.

On the terms explained here, we might view an argument as both an organization *and* a dissemination, since it collects ideas and then moves them internally from

[9] Consider further how the tools of informal logic include diagramming methods in which arrows point from premises to conclusion. This assumes the metaphor of movement; it captures the directional nature of reasoning.

premises to conclusion, and then externally to an audience. And it has features that facilitate both of these movements. Or at least the arguer has access to such features, many of which are to be found in the wealth of ideas available in the rhetorical tradition.

The static sense of argument sees arguments as products with no essential connection to the argumentative situation from which they arose. They are inert pieces of discourse, connected statements that can be judged "good" or "bad" merely in terms of their structures. (This is clearly the case with the traditional model and still the case generally with informal logic models). By contrast, a dynamic sense of argument sees arguments as social events, personalized by those engaged in them. They are alive with meaning and movement, and should only be judged "good" or "bad" in light of consideration of the entire argumentative situation (including the participants).

5. STRATEGIES OF NARRATIVE ARGUMENT

How, then, does narrative argument work as a type of dynamic argument (or feature of rhetorical argumentation)? I want to consider several strategies which provide something of an answer to that question, beginning with allusion. But first it is important to observe that narratives, unlike other stimulants of the imagination, lend themselves particularly to Aristotle's bringing-before-the-eyes (*pro ommaton poiein*).[10] This, as noted, is one of the principal ways by which we see *energeia* (actualization) operating in the *Rhetoric*, "for things should be seen as being done rather than as going to be done" (*Rhet.* III.10.6). It is an important contributor to our understanding of "presence" as a rhetorical idea, and captures a range of "activations" that good argumentation can achieve.

As Aristotle introduces this type of visual conceptualization,[11] he offers the following explanation: "To say that a good man is 'foursquare' is a metaphor, for both

[10] Or perhaps not. At this point, while this seems to me likely to be the case, I remain agnostic on the matter. My subject is narrative and I limit the discussion to this. But consider the wider range of cases that Scarry (1999) considers in exploring how poets and writers create ideas in the mind.

[11] What it does not create is visual vividness. George Kennedy observes (2007, p. 117) that *energeia* should be distinguished from *enargeia*, which means "clearness" or "distinctiveness." This may strike us as odd because it comes in spite of the prevalence of visual imagery throughout the *Rhetoric*. Quintilian's later association of "bringing-before-the-eyes" with enargeia encourages confusion on the relation: "I am complaining that a man has been murdered. Shall I not bring before my eyes all the circumstances that

are 'complete'; but it does not signify activity [*energeia*]." On the other hand, the phrase "having his prime of life in full bloom" is *energeia*, as is "you, like a free-ranging animal" (III.11.2). Something comes alive for the hearer through being actualized in such a way.

This visualization encourages attentiveness and provokes, as we later discover in the discussion of arrangement or *taxis*, receptivity [*eumatheia*]. If they are not attentive, hearers will not be receptive, "because the subject is unimportant, means nothing to them *personally*" (III.14.7, emphasis mine). Implicitly here is a concern for more than just large types of audiences with their various compositions that he had discussed in earlier books. Now, the subject must be brought alive for each member of an audience, and that involves making it important to each one personally in order for reception to occur. There is a large difference between a concept being active in the mind and visual vividness, and the two etymologies are distinct. But one would be forgiven for thinking Aristotle also had in mind the senses attributed to *enargeia*. That "bringing-before-the-eyes" should involve some kind of *phantasia* (imagination) is suggested by its perceptual nature. The audience *sees* something and *learns* from this. Thus, we have a cognitive effect arising from a perceptual cause. In Quintilian's example of *enargeia* the subject brings this on himself (mentioned in footnote 11). In the atmosphere of the *Rhetoric*, *energeia* is one of the means of persuasion that a speaker employs to move an audience. Still, there is no doubt that the quality of the mental experiences that arguers can invoke, and their accurate correspondence to perceptual experience, is important, as well as the "felt experience" of the audiences involved (Scarry, 1999, p. 42). This deserves further attention.

In fact, the phrase translated as bringing-before-the-eyes can be a misnomer because while the "eyes" before which ideas are brought are the internal eyes of the mind, the experience itself is broader, engaging the entire affective system in which cognition is inseparable from emotion. I am reminded here also of what Michael Burke (2011) has called "disportation," in describing the kind of affective change that takes place in a reader (2011, p. 232). This deeper sense of cognition is why the idea of the cognitive environment needed to be expanded to include emotion and value (Tindale, 2016). This gives us a much fuller sense of how audiences are engaged by "presence." And it is into this that our discussion of narratives must fit.

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it is reasonable to imagine must have occurred in such a connection? Shall I not see the assassin burst suddenly from his hiding place, the victim tremble, cry for help, beg for mercy, or turn to run? Shall I not see the fatal blow delivered and the stricken body fall?" (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 6.2.31-2).

5.1. Allusion

Consider the following extracts from Isocrates' *Antidosis*. He is defending himself at trial by telling a story about himself, one that details facts about his life and demonstrates his character:

> Isocrates is accused of being able to 'make weaker speeches stronger' [2000, p. 15]; he expects to have difficulty due to his old age and inexperience in such contests [2000, p. 26]; he says, 'I lived my past life without anyone accusing me of violence or injustice during either the oligarchy or the democracy' [2000, p. 27]; he is charged with corrupting the young by teaching them to speak well [2000, p. 30]; but, he observes, if he has harmed others, surely they would take the opportunity to accuse him [2000, p. 33, p. 92, p. 240]; it has been claimed that Isocrates is the cleverest of all men [2000, p. 35]; in spite of the charges against him, Isocrates suggests he should receive thanks for his contributions rather than punishment [2000, pp. 60–61]; in fact, he should receive greater thanks than those fed in the Prytaneum [2000, p. 95]; he observes that others beg and bring their children before the court, 'but I do not think anything of this kind is appropriate to a man of my age' [2000, p. 321].

No one who has read Plato's *Apology* can fail to be struck by the parallels between the remarks and events related by Socrates in that work and expressed by Isocrates here in his own trial speech. The *Antidosis* was written around 356 (and, it might be noted, was unsuccessful; Isocrates lost his case). But the question to explore here regards the "echoes" that we hear of another famous ancient text. Plato's *Apology* is generally held to have been written early in his career, and soon after Socrates' death in 399.[12] If it was written in the next decade at the latest, that would have it precede the *Antidosis* by several decades, ample time for it to find its place in the literature of the times and be familiar to educated audiences. Both works fit the genre of the trial speech, and it is possible they "refer" to an ur-text that forms the foundations of both.[13] But it is more likely that one alludes to the other. That such allusion is deliberate seems uncontroversial.

We should, then, consider how the argumentative use of allusion was intended to meet Isocrates' purposes. While the case involves what is essentially analogical reasoning, we have something far subtler than just an argument from analogy at work here. This is story-telling of the autobiographical kind. Through the use of allusion

[12] See, for example, Kahn (1996, p. 6).

[13] If so Gorgias' *Palamedes* would be a candidate (see Tindale, 2010, pp. 122–125).

Isocrates is able to evoke similarities between himself and Socrates, to draw the association in the minds of his audience. In this way, it serves as a potentially effective strategy of rhetorical argumentation. When we ask our question, 'How is the argumentation *experienced* by its audience?' we can imagine the appropriate activation in the audience, a consciousness arises as the connection is made and the relationship seen with the mind's eye. In placing such onus on the ability of the audience to make the connection, allusion has an effectiveness missing from more "removed" discourses and not captured in the static argument that might be extracted. Isocrates is not saying "here's my model of the philosopher; there's Plato's model." He tells a story that attaches his position to a life, a powerful life that has been forcefully depicted and defended in Plato's text. And Isocrates draws that force into his own case. Furthermore, the allusion argument invites the audience to complete the reasoning, to become complicit in the development of the argument towards its conclusion. The audience adds the missing elements; adds the connection, and as such Isocrates' conclusion is their conclusion as much as it is his. They have drawn it for themselves, and if this is done unconsciously, the allusion has been even more effective. But given the currency of Plato's text among educated audiences of the day, it is unlikely the allusions would have been missed. Isocrates' strategy would have been open and clear, and people left to decide for themselves, who between Plato and Isocrates is the fitting heir to Socrates.

5.2. Modification

Linda Hutcheon argues that "irony happens because what could be called 'discursive communities' already exist and provide the context for both the deployment and attribution of irony" (1994, p. 18). What she observes about irony holds equally for allusion, insofar as both depend on an audience's background and grasp of context. And what she calls "discursive communities" has affinities with the idea of cognitive environments that I have developed elsewhere (Tindale, 2015, 2016). These discursive communities are defined "by the complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 91), and she even provides a direct reference to Sperber and Wilson's concept of the cognitive environment, which she sees as a broader category of discursive community (1994, p. 96). Just as these communities provide the shared background that allows judgments about irony, so they supply the same for allusion. It is a cognitive environment that makes allusion (along with other similar devices) possible. They

arise by virtue of and in relation to such environments, and it is through those environments that we can measure their success when they are employed argumentatively.

Wilson and Sperber (2012) describe the cognitive environment as the "audience's mental landscape" (2012, p. 87). There is much to exploit in this physical metaphor. It has its earliest suggestion in the Aristotelian *topos*, a space the meaning of which is disputed, but which is clearly a shared space that arguers are able to draw on in identifying their opening premises. It is the assumption of commonality that is important here. Arguers can *expect* certain ideas to be available, certain values to be accessible. This is a better thing than common knowledge itself, because it involves what is available in the epistemic field of an audience, rather than what individuals actually know in common. A strategy like allusion depends on this expectation for its success.

A popular analogue for understanding cognitive environments is that of the visual environments that we share. Our visual fields teem with potential information that we do not process at any particular time, but that someone who shares that visual field (or who is aware of its contents) could expect us to "see." Knowing that it is there, dormant but accessible, allows someone to employ various devices to make it present to us, to foreground this or that object and facilitate its apprehension. By such means our understanding of what is around us is modified.

Similarly, cognitive environments are modifiable through argumentation. Arguers strive to make present, to actualize, what is there potentially, to make connections between ideas and beliefs that result in further insights, or to move us to action by simply adding to our cognitive environments or weakening some attachment we had to an idea there. As Wilson and Sperber observe, adding a new piece of information to a cognitive environment will modify it, "but it can equally well be modified by a diffuse increase in the saliency or plausibility of a whole range of assumptions, yielding what will be subjectively experienced as an *impression*" (2012, p. 87). Here, of course, a range of rhetorical effects could be adopted. In fact, the notion of cognitive environments provides insight into the cognitive nature of rhetoric and how is can operate in persuasion.

Like other ways in which the cognitive environment is modified, narratives create presence. Consider how Barack Obama uses narratives as components of two of his speeches. He does it in 'A More Perfect Union' (2008), the argument/speech he delivered after the "racist" controversy that surrounded some of the remarks of his

pastor, Jeremiah Wright, and he does it later at Grant Park (2008) on the night of his first election as President.

Let me begin with the first of these. During his initial campaign for the US presidency Barack Obama was almost undermined by comments made by his former pastor, comments deemed racist. Obama had successfully avoided issues of race throughout his campaign. But Wright's comments forced him to address them, and he did so in a speech in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008. To my mind, this speech was largely an example of how to handle Guilt by Association argumentation. He then used an extended argument by analogy to show that the concerns of disaffected blacks were also shared by disaffected whites, that at root the things Wright complained about were felt across a broad swatch of American society. But at the close of his speech he told a story:

> There is a young, twenty-three-year old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, South Carolina. She had been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there.
>
> And Ashley said that when she was nine years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.
>
> She knew that food was one of their most expensive costs, and so Ashley convinced her mother that what she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else was mustard and relish sandwiches. Because that was the cheapest way to eat.
>
> She did this for a year until her mom got better, and she told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents too.
>
> Now Ashley might have made a different choice. Perhaps somebody told her along the way that the source of her mother's problems were blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally. But she didn't. She sought out allies in her fight against injustice.
>
> Anyway, Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this elderly black man who's been

> sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he does not bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone in the room, 'I am here because of Ashley.'
> 'I'm here because of Ashley.' By itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man is not enough. It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children.
> But it is where we start. (http://obamaspeeches.com/099-Announcement-For-President-Springfield-Illinois-Obama-Speech.htm).

Here we have a story within a story. Obama tells Ashley's story in which Ashley tells her story. But Obama's story is more than her story, it includes its impact on those present and culminates in the recognition between the elderly black man and the young white woman. They have a common interest in fighting injustice, and insofar as Obama has presented his campaign as a fight against injustice, their common interest supports his campaign. To the counter argument to guilt by association and the argument from analogy, Obama adds a narrative argument. It doesn't stand alone but supplements the argument by analogy (the argument that shows an analogous set of concerns for poor blacks and poor whites). It does this by personalizing the argument, by situating it in real, identifiable lives. The claims about poor blacks and whites are not left on the abstract level, they are given presence and immediacy in Ashley's story. As theorists as diverse in their opinions of narratives as Paula Olmos and Trudy Govier observe, representation is an important aspect or achievement of narratives (whether by analogy, symbolism, or, in this case, instantiation), and Ashley's story has power because it is representative. We could attempt a reduction to premise/conclusion form, but I think we must agree that something is lost in doing so. I will return to this.

Just under eight months later, Obama is standing at the podium in Grant Park, Chicago celebrating his victory. He gives a speech that addresses multiple audiences: those who supported him, those who didn't, those who watch from beyond American shores, and so forth. He had something for each of them, expressed through a continued argument for union. But again toward the end of the speech he reverted to a story, that of Ann Nixon Cooper.

> This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing – Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.
> She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons – because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.
> And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America – the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can.
> At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes we can.
> When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs and a new sense of common purpose. Yes we can.
> When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved. Yes we can.
> She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that 'We Shall Overcome.' Yes we can.
> A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination. And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change. Yes we can.
> America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves – if our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made? (http://obamaspeeches.com/E11-Barack-Obama-Election-Night-Victory-Speech-Grant-Park-Illinois-November-4-2008.htm).

Here we have a clear "representation" narrative. Ann Nixon Cooper's story is America's story. Obama is able to look at the accomplishments of the United States not from some abstract stance, some "bird's-eye" (or god's-eye) view, but through the eyes of someone who experienced it. Thus, the story is "felt" by those who hear it, we can imagine what it was like to be Ann Nixon Cooper. The narrative is epideictic in

nature, and it culminates in the call for progressive change, and an invitation to share in those changes.

Afterthought or climax, what role do these narratives play? These narratives supplement the other strategies of the argumentation[14] by bringing something alive in the mind. In the Grant Park speech, the story of Ann Nixon Cooper parallels that of an America she represents. Massive social events are brought down to the personal (and manageable) perspective of one life, whose experiences are shareable. In the case of Ashley Baia, the story personalizes the point of recognition between races, which Obama believes is vital for movement beyond the current impasse.

On Kvernbekk's (2003) terms, Obama's examples are not arguments per se: "it hardly seems likely that the premise-conclusion relation found in narratives is similar to that found in informal arguments" (2003, p. 8). Indeed, such an argument is largely implicit. Premise: Ann Nixon Cooper has seen a series of remarkable progressive events in her life. Premise: Her experience parallels/represents America's experience. Conclusion: America has come a long (progressive) way. Kvernbekk might argue that Obama's complex audience *knew* America had come a long way. So this would be explanation more than argument. But if indeed his audiences knew that, the knowledge was implicit in their cognitive environment. And what the Ann Nixon Cooper story does is make it present; it activates it so that it can be attended to and its implications pondered. And of course, as Kvernbekk also allows, her assertion about the dissimilarity between premise/conclusion relations in narratives and arguments "depends on what one takes an informal argument to be" (2003, p. 8). The more dynamic nature of argument is apparent in both of Obama's narratives.

As I suggested at the end of section 4, we need to view arguments as social events, personalized by those engaged in them. The Obama "narratives" vividly illustrate my point. Those examples illustrate the dynamic sense of argument insofar as they are alive with meaning and movement, and should only be judged "good" or "bad" in light of consideration of the entire argumentative situation, which is complex in each of the cases involved. They both retain the internal movement characteristic of all arguments, exhibiting relevant relations between the ideas, whether we see these narratives as examples of analogy or representation. But their value lies in the dissemination of those ideas to the appropriate audiences.

[14] With respect to images, Roque (2015) had suggested they could operate as "visual flags," "parallel argument", or "joint argument" (p. 187). None of these really captures the way narratives operate within argumentation, but the idea of "parallel argument" might serve best to convey what is involved.

In each case, the stories are not recalling what is already there, as in allusion; but they are adding to what is currently available. What is the argumentative force of such a strategy, and could it be achieved (or better achieved) in any other way? In the Grant Park story, probably not. They may have the force of reinforcement, or of persuasion itself. They are insightful, and they add to the cognitive resources that members of an audience have to think through an issue and come to their own decisions regarding it.

6. CONCLUSION: DENNETT'S MEMES

There is much more to be said about narrative argument. In many ways the conversation is just beginning and promises to be as rich and fruitful as that which sketched out the nature of visual argument and then filled in the details. Narratives, as some of my examples would indicate, are often a part of analogical reasoning, for example. Especially the kind of *a priori* analogies explored by Govier (1999). The connections between philosophers' thought experiments and analogical reasoning deserve serious attention from the perspective of the narratives involved, since it does seem that in such cases analogy picks up where theory has reached its limits (Bartha, 2010, 320ff.). Another avenue of research that I have begun to touch on here, and that brings the nature of the cognitive environment fully into focus, is the ways in which narratives in arguments act as memes.

So let me close by returning to one of the sources from which I drew at the start: Dennett's "story." Dennett's story in his 1995 book (as in other works) is the story of the meme, that gene-correlate that replicates itself in human minds (as well as in noncerebral forms), or as Dennett refers to them: "meme nests" (1995, p. 349). As with genes, what is copied and transmitted by these new replicators is information. Darwin's dangerous idea is explained as a meme with all the force of that idea. Memetic theory, while still controversial, offers a range of fascinating ideas that should prove attractive to rhetoricians and argumentation theorists. In the context of his book, Dennett describes it as a "through and through Darwinian vision of a mind" (1995, p. 368).

Memes possess the central characteristics of any selective evolutionary theory: variation, replication, and fitness. Some are conceived and, for a number of reasons, never replicate, perhaps because the mind in which they arose forgets them. Other memes have enviable durability. The opening bars of a song like the Lennon and

McCartney tune "Yesterday" are clearly a meme, replicating in isolation from the rest of the song, but retaining much of their origin. That you, reader, have just recalled those opening bars demonstrates the existence and the power of the meme to replicate across minds. In general, Dennett understands memes to be "any culturally based replicators" (Dennett, 2006, p. 345), and these would include narratives that live within and across cognitive environments.[15]

Memes convey information, and Dennett uses the metaphor of the "infosphere" (in contrast to the biosphere medium in which genes move) in ways that capture some of what I conceive to be involved in cognitive environments.

He closes the work that had begun with the rejection of argument and the adoption of narrative with the following meme:

> A meme that occurs in many guises in the world's folklore is the tale of the initially terrifying friend mistaken for an enemy. 'Beauty and the Beast' is one of the best-known species of this story. Balancing it is 'The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.' Now, which meme do you want to use to express your judgment of Darwinism? Is it truly a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? Then reject it and fight on, ever more vigilant against the seductions of Darwin's idea, which is truly dangerous. Or does Darwin's idea turn out to be, in the end, just what we need in our attempt to preserve and explain values we cherish? I have completed my case for the defense: the Beast is, in fact, a friend of Beauty, and indeed quite beautiful in its own right. You be the judge (Dennett, 2006, p. 521).

This invitational closing statement marries the narrative with the argumentative. It draws on traditional and new rhetorical devices in the metaphor and the meme. Most importantly, however, it illustrates how cognitive environments (or infospheres) are modifiable. Specifically, Dennett modifies our ideas about Darwinian theory using a popular narrative-meme to suggest the beauty in Darwin's idea.

More artful methods of argumentation facilitate persuasion by personalizing the message, bringing immediacy and vivacity to the experience of being an audience for certain arguments. Some narratives clearly qualify in this respect, and how they achieve what they achieve has been the goal of this paper. If my argument has not, so far, been successful, I will need to resort to a story.

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[15] Strictly speaking, a narrative communicated for the first time acts as a meme if it is replicated in a second mind. But I am interested here in the *general* memetic nature of some narratives and hence of those that have replicated many times and have cultural currency, like the 'beauty and the beast' story.

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Umješnije metode: narativne tehnike u argumentaciji

Sažetak

Naslov i inspiraciju za ovaj rad pronašao sam u radu Daniela Dennetta koji na početku jedne svoje knjige govori o tome da se ne može pomoću formalnih argumenata navesti ljude da ozbiljno razmišljaju o određenim temama jer se to u većini slučajeva neće dogoditi. Treba koristiti metode koje su "vještije", odnosno, "treba ispričati priču". Potrebno je istražiti razliku između formalne argumentacije i pričanja priče kao metode uvjeravanja. Ako se pažnja preusmjeri na narativ, kao što Dennett predlaže, otvaraju se zanimljiva pitanja: Što je persuazivno u narativu? Kako se narativ argumentativno obraća publici? Da bi se odgovorilo na ta pitanja, analizirani su primjeri narativa za koje se zna da postižu učinak uvjeravanja. Analizirani su u sklopu šireg konteksta koji se istražuje, a to je kognitivno okruženje, njegove karakteristike i utjecaj, što otvara mogućnost analize različitih postupaka koji imaju i narativna i argumentativna obilježja, poput aluzija ili memova, kojima se bavi i sam Dennett.

Ključne riječi: argumentacija, kognitivna okruženja, narativi, priče