Narrative Why-Explanations

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Abstract

Narrative Why-Explanations

Narratives, or stories, are found in many disciplines, including history, the social sciences, evolutionary biology and psychology, and of course the writing of literary fictions. They can even be found in parts of the physical sciences. But why tell stories? There are many reasons. Stories, of course, provide explanations of many of the events that occur within the story. They explain how we got from here to there, for example, from a state of peace to one of war. But they do more than that. They often explain why the conclusion of the story occurred, or at least the conclusion of a sequence of events in the story. I am going to argue that stories, taken as wholes, do indeed often explain why their conclusions occurred: they provide what I shall call *narrative why-explanations* (sometimes for short, narrative explanations) of their conclusions. Further, I shall argue that a narrative why-explanation often has more explanatory strength than any standard why-explanation that we can come up with. In that sense, narrative explanations are often irreplaceable. Why tell stories, then? Because they provide us with why-explanations that we cannot get in any other way. To illustrate my thesis I shall be using examples from a number of areas including evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology.

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